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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FULFILLING GREGORY'S GOAL: THE CONVERSION OF THE ANGLO-SAXON PEOPLE

BY

Patricia L. Walker

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **FULFILLING GREGORY'S GOAL: THE CONVERSION OF THE ANGLO-SAXON PEOPLE** submitted by **Patricia L. Walker** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century A.D. was a complex process that involved several stages. The Roman missionaries who came to southern England in the late sixth century had an agenda for carrying out the conversion. This agenda entailed the attainment of the cooperation of the English kings, the establishment of an ecclesiastical institution based on a Continental diocesan organization, and finally the conversion of the common folk. Progress toward the achievement of this goal was impeded by the interference of Irish missionaries in the north of England, who had their own methods of introducing Christianity to a pagan people. By studying literary sources rarely used by historians, as well as re-examining historical sources such as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, various Saints' *Lives* and legal documents, this thesis will discuss the Roman agenda, the apparent conflict between the Roman and Irish missionaries, and will conclude with a chapter on the Anglo-Saxons' reception of the new doctrine.

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Introduction

In the late sixth century A.D., when he decided to set in motion a plan that he had been formulating for several years, Pope Gregory the Great initiated a series of events which brought about the transformation of a society. When he sent Augustine and his band of forty monks north from Rome in 596, Gregory's ultimate goal was the salvation of English souls. This thesis will trace the steps of that complex process from the time of Augustine's arrival in Kent to the point that the English could truly be called a Christian people.

The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons has recently become a popular topic in the historiography of seventh century England. Although F.M. Stenton and R. Hodgkin discussed the events of the seventh century in their seminal histories of Anglo-Saxon England, their purpose was to provide a narrative of historical events. As a result, they did not delve into the topic other than to discuss its political and institutional developments.[1] Generally, historians continued in this vein until 1972, when Henry Mayr-Harting offered a new perspective by attempting to discern the underlying forces of the conversion process. In particular, he examined the apparent conflict between the Roman and Irish missionaries, the influence of the Papacy, and the churchmen's conception of their task as they attempted to Christianize the Anglo-Saxons.[2] Since he focused on the clergy, however, little emphasis was placed on the role of the

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[1] F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*. 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1971); R.H. Hodgkin, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*. Vol. 1. 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1951)

[2] Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1972),

new converts.[3]

In his review, "Observations of the Conversion of England," James Campbell has identified several relevant themes which were not brought out in Mayr-Harting's work. Campbell's criticisms suggest that the field still has much to offer, particularly in regard to both the impact of Christianity in England before 597 and the development of the cult of royal saints.[4] In addition, he has raised questions concerning the issue of the evolution of the Church's independent power structure during the later part of the seventh century, which will be touched upon below. Finally, the issues of the conversion of the kings and the reception of Christianity by the common people will also be examined in some detail.

About the time that Mayr-Harting's work was published, a number of more specific studies also appeared, each of which dealt with various aspects of the conversion of the English. Such investigations can generally be divided into five categories. The first group is distinguished by their emphasis on the politics of conversion. The earliest example of this group is J.M. Wallace-Hadrill's book, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent*, which is a compilation of lectures. One lecture dealt with the political motives behind King Æthelberht of Kent's decision to allow Augustine to baptize him.[5] Another work which elaborates on this theme is Arnold Angenendt's article, in which he suggests some definite

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[3] James Campbell, "Observations on the Conversion of England," *Ampleforth Journal* 78.2(1973) p.12

[4] This is a task which has subsequently been taken up by Susan Ridyard in her work, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1988)

[5] J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971)

advantages that existed for kings who combined religion and politics.[6]

A second group of scholars is particularly interested in Papal policy. For the most part, Anglo-Saxon historians tend to follow Bede's example and stress Pope Gregory's abiding interest in England, even though Wallace-Hadrill, in his article on Papal involvement in the developments of the English Church, cautioned historians to keep this in perspective. He warned that Gregory and his successors were concerned with far more immediate problems than those of England, and that the islands in the northwest were generally relegated to the periphery of their thoughts.[7] Yet Gregory's interest in the English predates his elevation to the pontificate, and even when he was busy or ill he found the time to write to the missionaries in England to offer advice and words of encouragement.[8]

A third group focuses less on the political and institutional aspects of conversion, and looks instead at the ministry and the attitudes toward pastoral care. Sarah Foot, for example, deals with a problem which hampered the Church in the sixth to eighth centuries, namely, the issue of who was

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[6] Arnold Angenendt, "The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons Considered Against the Background of the Early Medieval Mission," *Settimane di Studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*. Vol. 32 (Spoleto, 1988) pp.747-792

[7] Wallace-Hadrill, "Rome and the Early English Church: Some Questions of Transmission," *Settimane di Studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 1960)

[8] R.A. Markus, "Gregory the Great and a Papal Missionary Strategy," *Studies in Church History*, vol.6, ed. G.J. Cuming (1970)

responsible for pastoral care.[9] This is an issue that was also taken up by Thomas L. Amos, who argued that in England the task was largely undertaken by monks, even though, as Foot has argued, bishops disapproved of the monks' involvement.[10]

Other historians have taken an interest in the role of the Irish, which has become a rather fashionable topic in the past decade. While Nora K. Chadwick and Kathleen Hughes both wrote seminal works on the Celts in the 1950s and 1960s, the 1980s have seen an increase in the amount of work done in this field.[11] Besides the works of Martin McNamara and Patrick O'Neill, who have studied Irish cultural influence in Northumbria, there is also a series of articles edited by James P. Mackey and another by Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter. These studies, together with several doctoral theses which have recently been completed stress the importance of the influence of the Irish in early Christian England.[12] Although

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[9] Sarah Foot, "Parochial Ministry in Early Anglo-Saxon England: The Role of Monastic Communities," *Studies in Church History*. 26(1986) pp.43-54

[10] Thomas L. Amos, "Monks and Pastoral Care in the Early Middle Ages," *Religion, Culture and Society: Essays in Honour of Richard E. Sullivan*. Ed. Thomas F.X. Noble and John J. Contreni, *Studies in Medieval Culture*. 23(Kalamazoo, Mi., 1987) pp.165-180

[11] The main works by Chadwick and Hughes used for this study are Nora Chadwick, *The Age of Saints in the Early Church* (London, 1961) and Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (New York, 1966).

[12] Martin McNamara, "Monastic Schools in Ireland and Northumbria before A.D. 750," *Milltown Studies* 25(1990) pp.19-26; Patrick P. O'Neill, "Irish Cultural Influence in Northumbria: The First Thirty Years, A.D. 635-664," *Crossed Paths: Methodological Approaches to the Celtic Aspect of the European Middle Ages*. Eds. Benjamin T. Hudson and Vickie Ziegler (New York and London, 1991) pp.11-23; James P. Mackey, *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh, 1989); Próinséas Ní Chatháin and

the relative novelty of the topic has resulted in some debate over details, generally all the authors who deal with this issue stress the importance of the role that the Irish played in England. Their work has also raised some interesting questions about the overall success of the Roman mission.

Another body of scholars emphasizes the strength of the Anglo-Saxons' ties to their pagan roots. For example, Gale R. Owen investigates the survival of pagan customs and examines the conversion from the pagans' perspective.[13] There are also several articles which follow in a similar vein, such as J.S. Ryan's "Othin in England," Bruce Dickens' "English Names and Old English Heathenism," and Wilfrid Bonser's "Survivals of Paganism in Anglo-Saxon England."[14] The popularity of this particular theme is older than the specialized study of the conversion itself.

The works mentioned above typify the main fields of interest that have evolved in the historiography of the English conversion. Many of these works seized upon those themes which Campbell cited as requiring further study in 1973. Nevertheless, this is still a comparatively new field, and while the sources have been examined in great detail they still

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Michael Richter, eds. *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission* (Stuttgart, 1987); Colin Ireland, *The Celtic Background to the Story of Cædmon and his Hymn*. Doctoral Dissertation, (University of California, Los Angeles, 1986).

[13] Gale R. Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1981)

[14] J.S. Ryan, "Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England." *Folk-Lore* 74(1963) pp.460-480; Bruce Dickens, "English Names and Old English Heathenism," *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* 19(1934) pp.8-160; Wilfrid Bonser, "Survivals of Paganism in Anglo-Saxon England," *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society* 56(1932) pp.37-70.

have much to yield. This is particularly true when one turns away from the traditional historical sources. As this thesis will attempt to illustrate, there are exciting aspects of Anglo-Saxon society that studies into the language and literature of the era can illuminate. Although studies in these fields are not new, they have been largely neglected by historians. In works such as *The Beginnings of English Society* and *The Audience of Beowulf*, Dorothy Whitelock has made abundantly clear how valuable such interdisciplinary studies can be for scholars of the Anglo-Saxon era.[15]

Such an interdisciplinary approach can be applied to more specific studies like that of the conversion era to yield new insights into the subject. As a result, both historical and literary sources have been examined for this thesis.

The most comprehensive historical source for this period is, of course, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which was completed in Northumbria in A.D. 731.[16] In writing this work, Bede made great use of the libraries housed in the monasteries of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow. His purpose was to write a history of the Church in England from the time of Caesar's arrival to 731. Although the first six centuries of this period are given only a cursory examination due to the limitations of Bede's source material, the events which follow Augustine's arrival are discussed in greater detail. Because of Bede's location in Northumbria and the sources available to him, the events in the northern region of England receive greater attention than those of the south, particularly Wessex, although Bede did not neglect this region altogether. As an

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[15] Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (London, 1952); *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1951)

[16] *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969)

historian, Bede has been praised for his modern methodology, his relative objectivity and his reliability.[17]

There are many other written works from this period which supplement the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. These include the *Lives* of the various saints, in particular those of Wilfrid and Patrick.[18] Although these sources have strong hagiographical biases, they nonetheless contain useful information about the course of historical events. There is also a variety of letters, some of which, particularly those of Gregory, are found in Bede's work, but others have also been preserved and are now printed in compilations such as Dorothy Whitelock's *English Historical Documents* and J.N. Hillgarth's *The Conversion of Western Europe.*[19] In addition, the writings of Pope Gregory and St. Patrick have also been consulted.[20]

Of less value have been the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the legal documents, although they do yield a few useful fragments. Even though it was compiled in the eleventh century, The *Peterborough* version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* contains some interesting information concerning the foundation of the

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[17] John Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1962) p.210-211; Stenton, p.187; Hodgkin, pp.352-4

[18] Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid.* Text, translation and notes, Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927); Muirchu, *Life of St. Patrick,* in *St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchu's Life.* Ed. and trans. A.B.E. Hood (London, 1978)

[19] Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents: c.500-1042.* General editor to the series, David C. Douglas (London, 1955); J.N. Hillgarth, ed., *The Conversion of Western Europe: 350-750* (New Jersey, 1969)

[20] *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care.* Text and notes by Henry Sweet (London, 1871); *Confessio, Epistola,* and *Dicta* of Patrick, in A.B.E. Hood, ed.

monastery of Peterborough in the seventh century.[21] There are only a few charters surviving from the seventh century, but those that are extant generally concern donations to the Church. These charters also contain boundary clauses, which provide some interesting place-name evidence.[22] Similarly, while only a few law codes have been preserved from that time, those that remain provide interesting clues about the law-makers' perception of the position held by the Church in Anglo-Saxon society.[23]

Although there are many prose and poetic works in Old English that could easily have found their way into this thesis, only five of the most pertinent have been included.[24] Among these are two elegies, "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer," both of which compare pagan and Christian ideals to determine

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[21] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* Trans. G.N. Garmondsway (London, 1953, revised 1954, reprinted 1965). The Parker and Peterborough texts are presented in parallel in this edition.

[22] For a study of boundary clauses in Worcestershire, see Della Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1990)

[23] *Cartularium Saxonicum.* Ed. W. de Gray Birch, vols. I & II (London, 1885); *Gesetze der Angelsächsen.* Ed. F. Liebermann, vol. I (1960); Selections of charters and laws have also been translated in Whitelock, *EHD.*

[24] The five works that have been chosen are those that are the most relevant to the topic. Although there is controversy about the composition dates of these works, all can generally be estimated to be within a century of the conversion period. There is a particularly strong debate about the dating of *Beowulf,* which is discussed in detail in Whitelock's *Audience of Beowulf,* pp.21-33. She herself prefers to assign the poem to the mid-eighth century. See also, Ritchie Girvan, *Beowulf and the Seventh Century: Language and Content* (London, 1971), and K.J. Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1953, rep. 1962)

their relative merits.[25] There is also *Beowulf*, which has been described as a Christian poem by some scholars and an heroic elegy by others; the inconsistency here illustrates why this poem can also shed light on the struggle between pagan and Christian ideals.[26] The Old English *Exodus* was chosen for the manner in which the story was altered when translated from the Latin to make it more accessible to an English audience.[27] Finally, there is the "Dream of the Rood," a vision poem, which is a uniquely Anglo-Saxon version of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.[28]

This thesis will focus on those aspects of the conversion which contributed directly to the fulfillment of Gregory's goal. In the preparation of this work it has become apparent that the term 'conversion' is rather insufficient, for it suggests only a sense of change without giving any indication of the complexities involved in the process of change. As a

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[25] "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" are preserved in the *Codex Exoniensis*. The editions consulted here are those of Benjamin Thorpe (London, 1842), and George Phillip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, in *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, vol. III (London, 1936, reprinted 1961)

[26] The edition of *Beowulf* used here is that of Fr. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. 3rd ed. (Massachusetts: 1950). Whitelock (*Audience*) and Mary Parker (*Beowulf and Christianity*, New York, 1957) view the poem as inherently Christian, while Raymond J.S. Grant ("*Beowulf* and the World of Heroic Elegy," *Leeds Studies in English*. New Series 8(1975):45-75) offers the opposing view.

[27] *The Old English Exodus*. Ed. Edward Burroughs Irving, Jr. (New Haven, 1953)

[28] "The Dream of the Rood" is preserved in the *Codex Vercellensis*. The edition used here is that of J.M. Campbell (London, 1843, reprinted, 1971)

result, this paper will identify three degrees of conversion—the superficial, conditional and spiritual—each of which will be discussed in detail in the first chapter. These divisions have proved to be a convenient means of describing the intensity of individual conversions.

Identifying the stages of the English conversion would be a simple matter if there were only one Christian culture to examine for this period. Unfortunately, as both the Romans and the Irish began to proselytize the Anglo-Saxons at about the same time, their relative importances are much harder to assess. This does not pose a problem, however, until the Romans and the Irish meet in Northumbria in the middle of the seventh century. Until that point, one can safely focus one's study on the Romans and their activities in the south.

Initially, Rome's priority was to secure a foothold in England. The missionaries, with the support of Pope Gregory, were prepared to content themselves with the kings' superficial and conditional conversions if it gave the ecclesiasts the opportunity to carve out a niche for themselves in English society. Once this was achieved, they could begin to establish a continental style ecclesiastical institution within England, complete with its diocesan organization, unity and uniformity.

To the Roman mind, the establishment of such an infrastructure was essential, for it made Christianity accessible to the populace as a whole, while maintaining the conversion and caring for the newly Christianized souls. This was a task that could best be accomplished first by educating scholars drawn from the society itself and training them to see to the needs of the Christian community. In the middle of the seventh century, however, two problems arose that had to be overcome before the Romans could establish such an infrastructure. The first, and perhaps the most pressing, was

the lack of strong ecclesiastical leadership in England, a problem that was eventually solved by making Theodore of Tarsus Archbishop of Canterbury. The other problem was less obvious and, as a result, more difficult to resolve. This was the strong and influential presence of the Irish missionaries in England. Although the Roman adherents won a political victory over the Irish at Whitby in 664, Irish influence in England was hardly diminished. While the political tensions were eased at Whitby, in terms of culture the traditions were different but not incompatible. For example, the institution which evolved to educate the English while carrying Christianity to the masses was neither Roman nor Irish, but an assimilation of the two. Indeed, by the end of the seventh century, it was becoming known as English, rather than Roman or Irish, since it was this new generation of English Christian scholars who were largely responsible for bringing their nation to its final stages of conversion.

It cannot be said that the society was truly converted until a substantial number of people from various social levels had experienced true spiritual conversions. Yet to understand this final degree it is necessary to have recourse to intellectual history—a field largely neglected by Anglo-Saxon historians, perhaps because of a pessimistic assumption that there is a lack of evidence. By studying the Anglo-Saxons' literature, however, one can get an inkling of what went on inside their minds as they considered accepting Christianity. The final chapter, then, will turn away from the organizers, missionaries and educators, and look rather at the converts themselves to witness their reception and gradual acceptance of the new doctrine.

Chapter One

The Three Degrees of Conversion

One of the problems associated with the study of the adoption of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England is the difficulty of determining what conversion actually entailed. In this context, conversion means a change of religion, but such a definition is somewhat too broad. Gregory understood that the conversion of the English would not be a rapid process; rather, it would happen in stages.[29] For this reason, to understand the conversion it is first necessary to understand the degrees to which Christianity was adopted. In Anglo-Saxon England, three degrees of conversion can be perceived. There is a superficial degree that entails very little change of belief, a conditional degree which involves slightly more commitment on the part of the convert, and finally a spiritual degree which involves an internalization of the religion itself.

Superficial conversions were undertaken largely for political motives. Essentially, such converts adopted the trappings of Christianity with little or no regard for the religion itself. Superficial conversions were characterized by the convert's quick renunciation of Christianity once it became politic to do so. King Rædwald of East Anglia exemplifies this type of pragmatic convert. During the early years of his

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[29] Gregory's letter to Mellitus found in *HE*, i.30.

reign, Rædwald was converted to Christianity while on a trip to Kent. Upon his return home, however, his wife convinced him to renounce his conversion. As a measure of caution, he had an altar for Christ prepared in his temple alongside the altars for the worship of the pagan gods:

> ita ut in morem antiquorum Samaritanorum et Christo seruire uideretur et diis, quibus antea seruiebat, atque in eodem fano et altare haberet ad sacrificium Christi et arulam ad uictimus daemoniorum.[30]

Rædwald's political motives help explain his actions. First, his initial conversion may have been a manifestation of the influence Æthelberht, as *bretwalda,* had over the East Anglian king. While Rædwald was in Kent, Æthelberht's influence would have undoubtedly been quite strong. As Rædwald himself aspired to the *bretwaldaship,* however, his return to paganism may have been an act of defiance towards Æthelberht, as Mayr-Harting argues.[31] If Bede's story is accurate, Rædwald's wife may have understood the political ramifications of his conversion and encouraged this defiance. At that particular point in time, however, Rædwald could not afford to be overly defiant of Æthelberht, so he chose to compromise by maintaining an altar for Christ in order to satisfy the Christian king. Rædwald's decision also reveals how superficial his conversion was in that he could accept Christianity, renounce it, and find a compromise so easily.

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[30] (in the manner of the ancient Samaritans, he seemed to serve both Christ and the gods whom he had worshipped before; furthermore, in the same temple, he had both an altar for sacrifices to Christ and a small altar for the victims of demons.) *HE,* ii.15

[31] Mayr-Harting, p.65

Political circumstances could also prevent a person from converting, regardless of his personal beliefs. When Augustine arrived in Kent and spoke with King Æthelberht, the king's first reaction was to decline the offer made by the visiting monks. One reason for his hesitation was political. Æthelberht was *bretwalda* and he ruled over a pagan, warrior society. His benevolence towards Augustine led to the rise of anti-Christian factions both in his kingdom and in the subkingdoms.[32] He had to take care that he did not provide the sub-kings with a rallying point—namely, the old gods—from which they could rise up against him. Furthermore, before the arrival of Augustine, Æthelberht's conversion would have had to come from Francia through Bertha and her chaplain, Luidhard. Yet as Wallace-Hadrill points out, such a move would have created yet another political tie between Æthelberht and the Frankish royal family.[33] This was something the king wished to avoid in order to maintain his independence from Francia. A mission from Rome was, however, a different matter. It would have been beneficial for Æthelberht both to be on good terms with the Pope and to have a special connection with Mediterranean civilization; by allowing himself to be baptized by Augustine, he could enjoy these privileges without becoming subservient to the Merovingians.

King Edwin of Northumbria also had a valid political reason for resisting conversion. In his youth, Edwin was exiled and subsequently lived in East Anglia under the protection of Rædwald. Although it is clear that Rædwald was not intolerant of Christianity, he was in the process of throwing off Kentish dominance at this time. As a result, he

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[32] Mayr-Harting, p.64

[33] Wallace-Hadrill, *EGK*, p.29

may have objected to the idea of Edwin's accepting Kentish Christianity. Edwin would have had to wait until the balance of power shifted away from East Anglia before he could consider conversion.[34] Each of these cases reveals little interest in the doctrine of the new religion on the part of the convert.

The second degree of conversion, although not unlike the first in terms of devotion, at least served to bring God into the picture. In the first degree the convert was doing little more than improving his political circumstances, comparable to making a peace treaty or arranging a marriage alliance. A second degree, or conditional, conversion involved making an arrangement directly with God. The potential convert agreed to accept the new doctrine only if God first performed some favour for him, the corollary being that if God failed to cooperate he would lose a potential convert.

This was a tactic to which kings occasionally resorted before battle. Perhaps the best-known example of this is the Frankish King Clovis's conversion in A.D. 496, as is recounted by Gregory of Tours:

> Now the queen without ceasing urged the king to confess to the true God, and forsake his idols; but in no wise could she move him to this belief, until at length he made war upon a time against the Alamanni, when he was driven of necessity to confess what of his free will he had denied. It befell that when the two hosts joined battle there was a grievous slaughter, and the army of Clovis was being swept to utter ruin. When the king saw this he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and knew compunction in his heart, and, moved to tears, cried aloud: '...If Thou grant me victory over these enemies, and experience confirm that power which the people dedicated to Thy

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[34] Mayr-Harting, p.66

> name claimeth to have proved, then will I also believe on Thee and be baptized in Thy name...' And as he said this, lo, the Alamanni turned their backs, and began to flee.[35]

Having secured this striking victory, Clovis fulfilled his end of the bargain. Clovis's acceptance of Christianity, however nominal, created the opportunity for missionaries to undertake the conversion of the Franks. Since Æthelberht was married to a Merovingian princess, it is very likely that he had heard of the story of Clovis's conversion, and would have taken Clovis's subsequent success into consideration when making his own decision to accept Christianity.

A similar event happened in Northumbria in 634. On the morning before his battle against Cadwallon, Oswald told an assembly of his people that God was going to give them a victory that day; he had learned this from a dream visitation by St. Columba which had occurred the previous night. His counsellors replied that if it were true, "they would believe and receive baptism after their return from the battle."[36] Again, the potential converts achieved an overwhelming victory, and promptly embraced Christianity. Although it should be recognized that Adamnan's view of this event is highly coloured by his desire to extol the holiness of SS. Columba and Oswald, the passage does illustrate that such tactics were used by those who wished to win converts.

Conditional conversions often took place during a time of crisis, when the potential convert was facing a particularly desperate situation. Such circumstances afforded the

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[35] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, ii.21. Trans. and ed. O.M. Dalton (Oxford, 1972)

[36] Adamnan's *Life of St. Columba*, *EHD*, p.691

missionary a perfect opportunity for proselytization. This was certainly the case with King Edwin. When Edwin was living in exile in East Anglia, King Æthelfrid of Northumbria asked Rædwald to have his guest murdered. Edwin knew Rædwald was considering the request and had wandered off to brood over his predicament. A stranger came to Edwin and posed two questions. The first was, "what reward will you give the man that shall deliver you out of this anguish...?" and the second, "if [that man] ... can also give you better advice for your life and salvation than any of your progenitors or kindred ever heard, do you consent to submit to him and follow his wholesome counsel?" Edwin promised that he would do all in his power for the man, and that he would heed his advice. The stranger then gave him a sign for which to watch. To Edwin's relief, Rædwald not only decided to spare him, but also helped him regain his throne.[37]

Years later, after failing in his many attempts to convince Edwin to convert, Paulinus came to the king and gave him the special sign. He told Edwin that God, not Rædwald, had saved him and established him in his kingdom, and therefore Edwin was bound by his promise to follow his "wholesome council." Mayr-Harting suggests that Paulinus understood that Edwin had been subservient to the East Anglian king and recognized that by 628 East Anglian dominance had waned enough to make it safe for Edwin to convert.[38] The final impetus required to get Edwin to convert was an attempt on his life by the king of Wessex. The assassination attempt was very nearly successful, and one of Edwin's loyal retainers was killed defending his king. Edwin swore that if his God helped him

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[37] *HE*, ii.12

[38] Mayr-Harting, p.67.

exact revenge, then he would agree to be baptised:

> ... rex promisit se abrenuntiatis idolis Christo seruiturum, si uitam sibi et victoriam donaret pugnanti aduersus regem, a quo homicida ille, qui eum uulnerauerat, missus est.[39]

Edwin subsequently obtained his revenge by marching into Wessex and forcing those who had plotted against him to surrender. Shortly afterward he brought his counsellors together to discuss the prospects of conversion.

Although Bede maintained that when Edwin finally did embrace Christianity it was a true spiritual conversion, the evidence rather suggests that Edwin was primarily concerned with his political situation. This is evidenced by his resistance of Paulinus' overtures until his political position was secure. Perhaps Edwin's conditions were merely diplomatic means of postponing such an important decision.

A conditional conversion involved more commitment on behalf of the convert than a superficial conversion. In making the bargain, the potential convert brought himself into a personal relationship with God. While Christian doctrine teaches that it is rather hubristic to think that one can bargain with God, at least the convert was, to some extent, coming to terms with him, rather than just making a pragmatic political manoeuvre.

In contrast, the third degree of conversion involved true spiritual conversion. With all other matters set aside, the convert came to feel in his heart that the Christian God was

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[39] (The king promised that he would renounce the idols and serve Christ if God would give him his life and victory over the hostile king by whom the assassin who had wounded him was sent.) *HE*, ii.9

the true God, and was prepared to die before renouncing him. According to medieval ecclesiastical historians and hagiographers, all conversions fell into this category. An example of this is the story of St. Alban, as related by Bede. Alban, a pagan, gave a wandering ascetic shelter in his home one night:

> Quem dum orationibus continuis ac uigiliis die noctuque studere conspiceret, subito diuina gratia respectus exemplum fidei ac pietatis illius coepit aemulari, ac salutaribus eius exhortationibus paulatim edoctus relictis idolatriae tenebris Christianus integro ex corde factus est. Cumque praefatus clericus aliquot diebus apud eum hospitaretur, peruenit ad aures nefandi principis confessorum Christi, cui necdum fuerat locus martyrii deputatis, penes Albanum latere; unde statim iussit milites eum diligentius inquirere. Qui cum ad tugurium martyris peruenissent, mox se sanctus Albanus pro hospite ac magistro suo ipsius habitu, id est caracalla qua uestiebatur, indutus militibus exhibuit, atque ad uinctus perductus est.[40]

In Bede's mind, this was a true conversion, an act of faith so strong on Alban's part that he was willing to sacrifice his

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[40] (When he [Alban] saw him [the cleric] at continual prayer, day and night, divine grace gazed upon him and he learned to emulate the example of the cleric's faith and piety. Having been taught gradually by the cleric's wholesome words of encouragement, he abandoned the darkness of idolatry and became a wholehearted Christian. When the cleric had been staying with him for several days, it came to the ears of an evil government official that a Christian who could not yet be considered a martyr was hidden in Alban's home; and he immediately sent his soldiers there to make a very thorough search for him. And when they came to the martyr's cottage, St. Alban immediately put on the cloak worn by the cleric and offered himself to the soldiers in place of his guest and teacher, and thus he was taken in bonds to the judge.) *HE*, i.7

life to save the good cleric.

Such a conversion required a good deal of internal reckoning on the part of the convert. It represented a coming to terms with himself and his beliefs. By looking at the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons, in particular spiritual poems such as "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer," one is able to get inside their minds and witness that internal reckoning. In "The Wanderer," the poet attempts a sort of experiment with the persona. He takes that man away from his society, his kin, his fellow warriors, his hall and liege lord—all that a warrior society holds dear—and sends him off into the wilderness alone to see how he will reconcile all the things which his religion has taught him about his universe. In doing this, the poet can determine the desirability of Christianity by weighing the pros and cons of conversion. The persona comes to understand that, without the bonds of society, life is meaningless:

> Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlice bið
> þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð
> swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
> winde biwaune weallas stondaþ
> hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.
> Woriað þa winsalo, waldend licgað
> dreame bidrorene, duguþ eal gecrong,
> wlonc bi wealle.[41]

The Wanderer's dilemma is comparable to Bede's story of the conversion of Edwin, in which the king's advisor tells Edwin that life is like a sparrow flying through the hall. Within the hall, there is light and warmth. Mankind knows what

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[41] (The wise man will understand how ghastly it will be when all the prosperity of this world stands deserted, as even now in various places throughout this middle-earth walls stand blown upon by wind, snow-swept buildings are covered with frost, halls decay, lords lie dead, deprived of joy, and proud retainers are fallen by the wall.) "The Wanderer," ll.73-81

happens to that sparrow when it is in the hall, but within moments, the sparrow flies away, and they have no idea where its destiny lies.[42] What happens to man when he leaves the proverbial hall? Their religion does not provide a wholly satisfactory answer to that question. Yet the Wanderer explains it. What follows is darkness, cold and desolation: no friends, no hierarchy, no warming fire, nothing to which a man can relate. But the Seafarer, like Edwin's advisor, concludes that Christianity provides that answer for which the poets, like their personae, are looking. It not only tells mankind what happens to the sparrow once it flies out of the hall, but also promises that what follows is a life of eternal glory. Furthermore, as the Seafarer comes to appreciate, in God a man has an eternal liege lord. Once he has accepted the new faith, he will never again have to fear the desolation of utter loneliness.

While churchmen like Gregory undoubtedly understood the complexities of conversion, later hagiographers chose not to discuss them in order to avoid tarnishing the glorious image of the conversion. To ensure that the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons would achieve some degree of success, Gregory had to take those complexities into consideration when formulating his policy. Initially, the missionaries had to be satisfied with superficial and conditional conversions, if only to give the Church the opportunity to become well established in England. Once that had been accomplished, the missionaries could focus their efforts on the spiritual conversion of the people.

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[42] *HE*, iii.13

Chapter Two

The First Step: The Support of Kings

Many of those in positions of power were obliged to make politics their top priority. As a result, most could not make a greater commitment to the Church than superficial or conditional conversions. Yet it is not surprising that the early missionaries were content with this meagre degree of commitment on behalf of the kings. Ultimately, in terms of souls to be saved, those of the royal families numbered very few when compared to the number of those in England as a whole, and it was the people whom Gregory had expressed his interest in converting. As Bede relates, Gregory's interest stemmed from his seeing some Anglian slaves for sale in the market place in Gaul, which made him despair that

> ...quod tam lucidi uultus homines
> tenebrarum auctor possidet, tantaque gratia
> frontispicii mentem ab interna gratia
> uacuam gestat![43]

When Augustine arrived on the shores of Kent in 597, his first action was to request an audience with King Æthelberht. In the meeting, Augustine told the King how God helped his followers in war, how he made them prosperous in peacetime, and about how much more powerful he was than their heathen idols.

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[43] (...the author of darkness should possess men so bright of face and that such graceful bodies should bear minds devoid of internal grace!) *HE*, ii.1

Æthelberht was impressed, but not convinced. He told Augustine:

> Pulchra sunt quidem uerba et promissa quae adfertis; sed quia noua sunt et incerta, non his possum adsensum tribuere relictis eis, quae tanto tempore cum omni Anglorum gente seruaui.[44]

Nevertheless, Æthelberht invited Augustine to remain in Kent and preach to his people. By July of 598, Gregory was able to inform Patriarch Eulogius of Alexandria in a letter that 10,000 Englishmen had been baptized at Christmas, and it is likely that Æthelberht himself had accepted Christianity by the time he had his laws written down in 601.[45]

This method of gaining the king's support first would be repeated many times during the process of bringing Christianity to the English. The conversion of the East Saxons was preceded by the baptism of their king Sæberht; in Sussex, Wilfrid of Ripon first approached the king, then began to preach to the South Saxons;[46] and in Northumbria, Paulinus had first to bring Edwin to Christianity before he could build his church in York

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[44] (The words and promises you bring are attractive, but since they are new and uncertain, I cannot give consent to them and abandon those [beliefs] which all the English people have held for so long.) *HE*, i.25

[45] The letter is cited in Mayr-Harting, p.62. It is believed that Æthelberht had accepted Christianity by this time because of the very Christian tone of his laws, in which the Church is given first priority and is given a higher compensation value than even the king. The first law specifies that property stolen from the Church is to be repaid twelve-fold, while property stolen from the king is to be repaid nine-fold. Æthelberht's laws are printed in *EHD*, pp.357-359; See also Wallace-Hadrill, "Rome and the Early English Church," p.521

[46] Eddius, c.41

and set off into the countryside to carry out his missionary activities.[47] Finally, the Mercians, for the most part, remained heathen as long as Penda was in power, in spite of his religious tolerance, but as soon as his Christian son Wulfhere became king, the missionaries were able to make some headway in converting that kingdom.

There were a number of good reasons why the missionaries focused on the kings first. At a basic level, the Pope was of the same social class as the crowned heads of Europe. It is only natural that he would send his emissaries to his peers. Certainly, the Papacy was gaining in strength and authority at this time, and had reached a high point during the pontificate of Gregory the Great.[48]

Another suggestion is that if the king accepted Christianity, then his *gesithas*, or companions, would follow his example. Tacitus describes how strong the bonds of loyalty were between a Germanic chieftain and his followers. The chieftain was to be generous in providing them with food, shelter and wealth from the plunder of war, and in return, they were to show him the sincerest acts of devotion:

> iam vero infame in omnem vitam ac probrosum superstitem principi suo ex acie recessisse: illum defendere, tueri, sua quoque fortia facta gloriae eius adsignare praecipuum sacramentum est: principes pro victoria pugnant, comites pro principe.[49]

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[47] *HE*, ii.6

[48] Hughes, "The Celtic Church and the Papacy," *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*. Ed. C.H. Lawrence (London, 1965) p.8

[49] (...to leave a battle alive after the chief has fallen means lifelong infamy and shame. To defend and protect him, and to let him get the credit for their acts of heroism are the most

The bond was not purely material, however, as the persona of "The Wanderer" reveals when he describes the depth of his sorrow at the loss of his lord:

> Forþon wat se þe sceal his winedryhtnes
> leofes larcwidum longe forþolian
> ðonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre
> earme anhogan oft gebindaþ.[50]

On the strength of such loyalty, it would be reasonable to assume that retainers would readily follow their lord's example should he choose to embrace Christianity.

In practice, however, such was not always the case. Even though Bede tells us of the masses of people who were baptized with their kings, there were still some important personages who often remained pagan. Indeed, in at least one case it would appear that the king's conversion cost him the support of his followers. Bede writes that some time after his conversion King Sigeberht of Essex was murdered by his brothers who, upon being asked why they did it, replied that,

> nisi ob hoc se iratos fuisse et inimicos
> regi, quod ille nimium suis parcere soleret
> inimicis, et factas ab eis iniurias mox
> obsecrantibus placida mente dimitteret.[51]

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solemn obligations of their allegiance. The chiefs fight for victory, the followers for their chiefs.) Tacitus, *Germania*, in *Tacitus in Five Volumes*, vol. 1. (Cambridge, Mass., 1914. Rep. 1980) c.14

[50] (For he knows who shall do without his beloved lord's counsel for a long time when together sorrow and sleep often bind the wretched solitary man.) "The Wanderer," ll.37-40. See also Whitelock, *BES*, p.31

[51] (...they were angry with the king and hated him because he was too ready to pardon his enemies and calmly forgive them

The princes apparently felt that their brother's newly acquired Christian values did not befit a king, and that his charity was bound to do little good for the kingdom.

Angenendt notes that in Europe the sons of kings often remained pagan even after the conversions of their fathers. In England, this was the case with the sons and successors of Æthelberht of Kent, Sæberht of Essex, and Cynigils of Wessex. Often this situation resulted in mass renunciation of Christianity after the death of the king. Angenendt suggests that the sons' obstinacy was a political move designed by the king and son together as a protective measure, arguing that if the lords of the land were displeased with the king's decision to convert, or if it became apparent later that the decision was the wrong one and resulted in the development of a pagan political faction, then the son who had resisted Christianity all along could lead the faction and oust the father. In this way, the king's conversion would not put the entire dynasty at risk, and the son would be able to keep the crown in the family.[52]

There is also, however, a less amiable explanation for the sons' reticence. In his discussion of King Oswiu's problems with his son Alhfrith, who instigated the immediate events that led to the Synod of Whitby in 664, Richard Abels suggests that one means by which a son could prove himself worthy of succeeding his father was to defy his father and successfully overthrow him.[53] This may well be what inspired sons to resist

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for the wrongs they had done him as soon as they asked his pardon.) *HE,* iii.22

[52] Angenendt, pp.747-754

[53] Richard Abels, "The Council of Whitby: A Study in Early Anglo-Saxon Politics," *Journal of British Studies.* Vol.

conversion when their fathers accepted it, as in the case of Æthelberht's son, Eadbald, or to accept Christianity when the fathers resisted, as in the case of Penda and his son Wulfhere. If this be the case, it cannot be said definitively that the retainers would follow their king to conversion. Kings could reasonably expect that either their sons, their followers, or both might not be in favour of their decision to embrace Christianity and would resist conversion.

Yet it was still crucial for the missionaries to approach kings first, if not for their station as lords of the comitatus, then certainly because of their role as sacral kings. In pagan Germanic society the king had a religious role. He was not necessarily a priest, although his royal duties did include some intervention between his people and the god of his tribe. Tacitus wrote that there were two things that a king had to have, *nobilitas* and *virtus*.[54] *Nobilitas* meant descent from the gods; there had to be something about the king that was inherently divine. *Virtus* meant valour, bravery, and success as a war leader so that the king might bring glory and wealth to the tribe. These two virtues were inextricably linked, for not only did the king have to have divine blood in him but he also had to maintain his connection with the gods through rituals and sacrifices. If the relationship between the king and his god were good, then 'luck,' as it is described by William Chaney, would shine upon that king, and he would then possess the other virtue, *virtus*.[55]

23.1(1982) pp.6-8

[54] Tacitus, *Germania*, c.7

[55] William Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley, 1970) p.13;

As long as the tribe prospered, it was clear to all that their king was fulfilling both his religious and temporal duties properly.[56]

Chaney makes a further point that, akin to the idea that the king was responsible for the religious welfare of the tribe, it was also incumbent upon him to decide, with the help of his counsellors, which god would best serve the interests of the tribe. Generally, successive kings would adhere to tradition and worship the same gods as their predecessors as long as the tribe remained prosperous. If the situation deteriorated, however, the tribesmen would look to the king to correct the problem. His reaction might be to appeal to a new god. If things improved, the king and his people would have a new tribal god. In Germanic society, the god of the king was the god of the people.[57]

This has some important implications for the English conversions. If Chaney's argument is correct, then it would have been pointless for missionaries to preach in the countryside, for the common folk simply did not have the authority to decide such matters. It also sheds new light on statements like Gregory's that 10,000 people were baptized, or

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[56] Ridyard warns against carrying this royal characteristic too far into the Christian period in England, arguing that although sacrality was inherent in ancient Germanic kingship, Christian Anglo-Saxon kings had to earn their sanctity, pp.76-7,234. Nevertheless, at the time of Augustine's arrival, the Anglo-Saxon kings, as pagan kings, were still performing their sacral duties.

[57] According to Chaney, the king's 'luck' was associated with his ability to provide for his tribe. "When the king's 'luck' or charismatic power is maintained, the favour of the god [i.e., the tribal god, chosen by the king himself] rests with the tribe; when he has lost his 'luck' and is impotent to secure the divine blessings, his people are justified, even obliged, to do the only thing possible, to replace him with another who can make the office even more effective." (Chaney, p.12)

Bede's various assertions that many people were baptized with their king. Certainly there was no mass conversion of the people without the conversion of the king, as was apparent in the north when Paulinus enjoyed little or no success until Edwin converted, and afterward he was so busy baptizing people that he had to work from morning till night for thirty-six days.[58] In reality, it was not a matter of missionaries' efforts to convince large numbers of people individually that the Christian God was the true God; rather, it was the people's acceptance of their king's prerogative to choose their tribal deity.

If further support of this assertion is needed, it can be found in Northumbria after the death of King Edwin. Bede portrays the subsequent reversions as a consequence of Paulinus' departure, but an alternative explanation is also valid. When the two new kings of Deira and Bernicia preferred paganism over Christianity, that same multitude of people who had followed Edwin to the font now followed their new kings and renounced their earlier conversion. It was not until Oswald became their king and personally asked them to convert that the people of Northumbria once again received baptism and agreed to accept Christian doctrine.[59]

It was not a newfound appreciation for the Christian God which first attracted the people to the new religion; rather, it was their loyalty to the king and their adherence to the tradition of worshipping the king's god which accounted for their conversion. It is for this reason that if the Church wished to unite the English with the rest of European Christian fellowship it was crucial for the missionaries to win the

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[58] *HE*, ii.14; Stenton, pp.114-115

[59] *HE*, iii.1; Adamnan's *Life of St. Columba*, *EHD*, p.691

support of the English kings first.

It is apparent that the Church desperately needed the support of the king, not only as the impetus for mass conversion, as seen above, but also for the protection and advancement of the Church. One of Augustine's primary concerns was for his own personal safety. He and his small band of monks dreaded their arrival in Kent because of the frightening stories they had heard about the English:

> Qui cum iussis pontificalibus obtemperantes memoratum opus adgredi coepissent, iamque aliquantulum itineris confecissent, perculsi timore inerti redire domum potius quam barbaram feram incredulamque gentem, cuius ne linguam quidem nossent adire cogitabant...[60]

Indeed, they would even have turned back if Gregory had not forbidden it. Once in Kent, their safety depended on Æthelberht's good will, for upon their arrival he had them temporarily confined to the Isle of Thanet, the implication being that their lives would be at his mercy if they tried to

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[60] (When they had begun to undertake their task according to the papal commands and had already gone a short way of their journey, they became paralyzed with fear and decided that it would be better to return home rather than face a barbarous, fierce and unbelieving nation whose language they did not even understand.) *HE*, i.23. It is interesting to note that Æthelberht was similarly wary of the band of monks who arrived in his kingdom. He had them confined to the Isle of Thanet "donec uideret quid eis faceret," (until he had decided what to do about them) and when he did agree to meet them, "cauerat enim ne in aliquam domum ad se introirent, uetere usus augurio, ne superuentu suo, siquid maleficae artis habuissent, eum superando deciperent." (He took care that they should not meet in any building, for he held the traditional superstition that, if they practiced any magic art, they might deceive him and get the better of him as soon as he entered.) *(HE*, i.25) Who was more afraid of whom?

cross to the mainland without his permission. When the king finally did meet Augustine, he expressly gave them permission to travel freely in his kingdom, implying that they could feel reasonably safe from attack. Nevertheless, Augustine's band of monks did not stray far from their sanctuary in Canterbury until the king himself had been baptized.[61]

The early Roman missionaries' concern for their safety proved to be a valid one. Although there is no mention of any of Augustine's followers coming to harm in Kent as long as Æthelberht lived, when that royal protection disappeared conditions became rather hazardous for the Christians. This is evidenced by Mellitus' flight from London after being threatened by Sæberht's three pagan sons, and also by the decision made by Mellitus, Justus and Laurentius to leave England for the sake of their own preservation when the pagan Eadbald became king of Kent. Mellitus and Justus left quite soon, and only a vision of St. Peter and the timely conversion of Eadbald made it safe for Laurentius to remain and recall his companions from Gaul.[62] It was quite obvious to these three bishops that their ability to carry out their duties safely depended on the good will of their respective kings.

Royal support was not only necessary for the protection of the missionaries in Anglo-Saxon England, it was also instrumental in the advancement of the Church. In several cases, after the initial conversion, churchmen found the opportunity to enter a kingdom and establish new bishoprics by invitation of the king. An example of this is a request made by Sigeberht, who, shortly after his ascension to the throne of East Anglia, asked Archbishop Honorius to send him a bishop.

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[61] *HE*, i.25

[62] *HE*, ii.5-6

Honorius chose a Burgundian named Felix for the position and created the bishopric of Dunwich for him. There Felix founded a school, brought in teachers from Kent, and also encouraged scholars from farther away to come and settle, as did the Irish ascetic Fursa, who was given a derelict fort to use as a base for proselytization.[63]

Even more important than the mere invitations, however, was the financial support the kings offered the churchmen when they arrived. In many cases it was the king who provided the land and means for the first churches and monasteries to be built. Æthelberht gave Augustine an old church in Canterbury, then helped to restore it. Similarly, after his conversion, Edwin had a church built in York for Paulinus. But perhaps most impressive was the great church Wulfhere and Peada built in Peterborough that was to be the centre of pilgrimage in England, the destination of those who were unable to go to Rome.[64]

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[63] Fursa, however, as Godfrey writes, "was a visionary—liable to fall into states of trance—rather than a practical man. Wishing to rid himself of the tiresome business of governing his monastery, he handed its care over to his brother, Foilan, and departed for Gaul, where he spent his remaining years." (Godfrey, p.99); Also, see Stenton, pp.116-117. Other examples include Oswald, who sent to Iona and received Aidan, who was then made Bishop of Lindisfarne, and Cenwalh of Wessex who invited Agilberht to be Birinus's successor as bishop of the West Saxons and later sent to Paris for a bishop and received Agilberht's nephew Leutherius (Margaret Gallyon, *The Early Church in Wessex and Mercia* (Suffolk, 1980) p.12).

[64] *ASC, Peterborough Chronicle,* entry for 675. The letter that Pope Agatho wrote confirming the donation of Peterborough stated, "I desire and grant that whatever man may have made a vow to make a pilgrimage to Rome and be unable to fulfil it, whether on account of sickness or his lord's need or because of poverty or some other exigency which prevents his going, whether he come from England or whatever other island, let him come to the monastery at *Medeshamstede* [Peterborough] and have the same

The early charters also bear witness to the generous grants of land made by the kings to the Church for the building, restoration and maintenance of monasteries. Examples include Frithuwold, sub-king of Surrey who gave Abbot Eorcenwold a total of three hundred hides of land for the strengthening of the monastery of Chertsey and the foundation of a second monastery; Hlothere, King of Kent, who, in 677, granted royal lands in Thanet to Abbot Brihtwold for the support of his monastery; and King Ceadwalla of Wessex who, in 685-7, donated sixty hides of land in Farnham to three churchmen for the foundation of a monastery there.[65]

Perhaps equally valuable to the Church was the example of behaviour that the kings and their families set for the people. This could prove financially advantageous as wealthy families, like their kings, embraced the idea of patronizing monasteries. An example is a grant made by one Æthelmod:

> I, Æthelmod, with the consent of King Ethelred, grant for the relief of my soul to you, Beorngyth, venerable abbess, and to Folcburh, and through you to your monastery, 20 hides of land by the river which is called Cherwell...[66]

Although many of those who made such donations did so for selfish reasons, the foremost being the salvation of their souls, these people nonetheless provided the financial support that the Church needed to survive and flourish.

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forgiveness from Christ and St. Peter and from the abbot and from the monks that he would have if he went to Rome."

[65] Whitelock attests to the authenticity of these charters as well as the others printed in *EHD*, pp.440-445

[66] *EHD*, p.444. The charter does not give any indication of the identity of Æthelmod.

Susan Ridyard, in her study of royal saints, explains how royal families set examples of behaviour in other ways as well. She argues that, unlike pagan kings whose sacrality was inherent in their office, Christian kings and their families had to earn their sanctity. Royal ladies, she explains, were considered saintly if they chose religious life over royal life. The two were mutually incompatible as the duties of one would come into conflict with the obligations of the other. An example is child-rearing. Royal ladies were expected to produce fine children for the continuation of the dynasty, while virginity was a virtue highly admired among religious ladies. Since royal ladies had to choose one over the other, the truly saintly woman was the one who withdrew to the Church. However, this withdrawal was not an admirable quality for royal men, for, of course, if they abandoned secular life they would jeopardize both their dynasty and their kingdom. Their sanctity, according to Ridyard, lay more in their defense of Christianity against paganism. The truly saintly king was one who died for this purpose, as did King Edwin when he fell in combat against the pagan king Penda.[67] Part of Ridyard's contention is that these royal personages, and particularly royal women, set a standard of behaviour. If they were particularly pious, generous, devoted to religious life and the promotion of monasteries, then their people would follow their example.

It can be recognized how valuable royal support was, particularly when it concerned protection and financial assistance. It was not sufficient to win the support of a single king, however, as Paulinus, Mellitus and Laurentius learned upon the deaths of their royal converts; the Church had to find a way to take advantage of that traditional affinity

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[67] Ridyard, pp.75-95

between king and tribal deity and make itself indispensable to kingship as a whole. Early attempts at this are apparent in Gregory's letter to Æthelberht and Boniface's letters to Edwin and Æthelburh. For example, Gregory writes,

> ...omnipotens Deus bonos quosque ad populorum regimina perducit, ut per eos omnibus, quibus praelati fuerint, dona suae pietatis inpendat. Quod in Anglorum gente factum cognouimus, cui uestra gloria idcirco est praeposita, ut per bona quae uobis concessa sunt, etiam subiectae uobis genti superna beneficia praestarentur. Et ideo, gloriose fili, eam quam accepisti diuinitus gratiam, sollicita mente custodi; Christianam fidem in populis tibi subditis extendere festina.[68]

Similarly, Boniface writes,

> cui etiam summitates imperii rerumque potestates submissae sunt, quia eius dispositione omnium praelatio regnorum conceditur.[69]

In these letters, the Popes stress how the kings had received

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[68] (...the almighty God directs certain good men to be rulers of the people so that through their abilities he might extend the gifts of his righteousness to those who are chosen to receive them. We understand that this has happened to the people of England, over whom your majesty has been placed for that reason, so that through the blessings that have been bestowed upon you, divine rewards can also be given to your subjects. And so, glorious son, carefully guard that grace that you have received from God and make haste to spread the Christian faith to the people subject to you.) Letter from Gregory to Æthelberht found in *HE*, i.32

[69] (The greatest empires and the most powerful things are also subject to him, for it is by his disposition that all earthly rule is bestowed.) Letter from Boniface to Edwin found in *HE*, ii.10.

their power only through divine favour.

In becoming actively involved with the kings, the Church subtly redefined kingship and made it quite dependent on the Church, thus creating a symbiotic relationship between the two. One way this happened is discussed by Ridyard, who argues that the introduction of Christianity removed the inherent sacrality from kingship, as a result, if the king wanted to maintain the religious part of his office, he had to earn it by working very closely with the Church and devoting his life to its promotion.[70] Indeed, it came to be that the king needed churchmen to be involved in policy and decision making, if only to sanctify the decisions and lend them the weight of divine authority.

One manifestation of this can be found in the well-known laws of King Æthelberht. When Gregory wrote to Abbot Mellitus, he suggested that the Church be equitably reimbursed for property stolen from it. When Æthelberht had his laws written down in 601, however, he decreed that:

> the property of God and the Church [is to be paid for] with a twelve-fold compensation; a bishop's property with a nine-fold compensation; a deacon's property with a six-fold compensation; a cleric's property with a three-fold compensation.[71]

In addition, property of the king was to be repaid nine-fold and that of a freeman three-fold. This indicates that within four years of Augustine's arrival, the Church had already found its niche in Æthelberht's social hierarchy. If this hierarchy were to be put on a scale of one to twelve, freemen and clerics

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[70] Ridyard, pp.77-78

[71] *EHD*, p.357

would rank three, deacons six, kings and bishops nine, and God and the Church twelve. In this, Æthelberht not only made it his business to protect the Church but also placed it in the most prominent position in society.

It was important for the king to be thus involved, because it was his means of maintaining the religious role that had traditionally been associated with kingship. Although Ridyard argues that sacrality was no longer inherent in Christian kingship, the kings still needed a holy connection in order to keep their office. They could do this by making the protection of the Church their business, and treating it not only as their duty but also as their right to do so. Further, it would appear from Æthelberht's enthusiasm that the more devoted the king was to the promotion of the Church, the greater his ties to it would be, hence Æthelberht's decision to have the Church repaid twelve-fold, when Gregory would have been satisfied with less restitution.

The implication of this is that Æthelberht understood that sacrality was not inherent in Christian kingship, and that if he wanted to maintain the holy aspect of his office he would have to earn it by working in connection with the Christian Church. During the early stages of his conversion, this proviso was, in fact, made clear to Æthelberht. In a letter to the Kentish king, Gregory informed Æthelberht that not only was he responsible for the conversion of his people but also that this could not be done without an alliance with Augustine. He wrote:

> quaeque uos ammonet libenter audite, deuote peragite studiose in memoria reseruate; quia si uos eum in eo quod pro omnipotenti Deo loquitur auditis, isdem omnipotens Deus hunc / pro uobis exorantem celerius

exaudit.[72]

The terms of the agreement were made clear. If Æthelberht helped Augustine to achieve the conversion of the English people, then Augustine would act as a mediator between the king and God. No longer was the king to be the mediator between the people and their god; that duty would now rest on the shoulders of the trained churchmen. As a result, the king could maintain his holiness only through a close connection with the Church. Further, Gregory's letter implies that there was a new level in the hierarchy. Between the king and his god there was now a bishop, and Æthelberht reveals his comprehension and acceptance of this in his laws.[73]

King Cenwalh of Wessex also came to believe that a good relationship with the Church was requisite for success as a Christian king. As a result of a dispute regarding the division of the West Saxon diocese, Cenwalh's bishop,

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[72] (However [Augustine] counsels you, listen to it readily, follow it devotedly, and keep it carefully in mind; and if you listen to him when he speaks to you on behalf of Almighty God, Almighty God will hear more readily when [Augustine] prevails upon him on your behalf.) Letter from Gregory to Æthelberht found in *HE*, i.32

[73] This is not to imply that the Church, as an entity, had actively made it a policy to redefine kingship. As Wallace-Hadrill writes, "it is not that the Church has evolved and can present a clear doctrine of kingship. The position is rather that Churchmen, here and there, in widely differing circumstances, are ready to make claims on kings—claims that move roughly in the same direction." (Wallace-Hadrill, *EGK*, p.47). In this particular instance, it was Gregory himself who concluded that the kings would be positioned in the social hierarchy between God and the people, and that the bishops—the men among the highest ranks of the Church—would be between the king and God. It is Gregory's doctrine, conveyed to Æthelberht and very likely Augustine as well, that is reflected in Æthelberht's laws.

Agilberht, resigned his position and left Wessex in 663. For reasons Bede does not explain, Cenwalh sent his other bishop, Wine, into exile just three years later. At about this same time, Cenwalh was on the losing side of an ongoing dispute with King Wulfhere of Mercia, and he began to wonder if his misfortunes were the result of his maltreatment of his bishops:

> Quo etiam tempore rex praefatus ipsius gentis, grauissimis regni sui damnis saepissime ab hostibus adflictus, tandem ad memoriam reduxit, quod eum pridem perfidia regno pulerit, fides agnita Christi in regnum reuocauerit, intellixitque quod etiam tunc destituta pontifice prouincia recte pariter diuino fuerit destituta praesidio. Misit ergo legatarios in Galliam ad Agilberctum, summissa illum satisfactione deprecans ad episcopatum suae gentis redire.[74]

Agilberht already had commitments in Gaul by this time, however, so in his place he sent his nephew Leutherius, who was warmly welcomed by Cenwalh in 670.[75]

Ultimately, the kings came to believe that they were dependent on the Church since they were no longer sacral in their own right. By accepting this new, more powerful deity, they also had to accept that they needed to have trained churchmen mediating between themselves and him. Yet this did

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[74] (At this time the aforementioned king of the people, afflicted by serious misfortunes in his kingdom at the hands of his enemies, eventually remembered how, long ago, his lack of faith drove him from the kingdom, and how faith and recognition of Christ had restored him, and at the same time he understood how a land that was deprived of a bishop was equally and rightly deprived of divine assistance. Therefore he sent messengers into Gaul to Agilberht, offering to make amends and inviting him to return to the episcopate of the nation.) *HE*, iii.7

[75] Gallyon, p.12

not mean that the kings came to be wholly at the mercy of the Church. It was not long before they learned how to manipulate churchmen and to use Christianity, or at least conversion, as a political tool. There are, of course, the likely examples mentioned above of how this was accomplished directly, as when Æthelberht strongly influenced Rædwald's decision to convert, and when Edwin felt he ought not to convert as long as he was still under Rædwald's dominion.[76] These are simple examples of the politics involved in conversion. Yet it is also clear that the kings could increase their own power and authority by controlling the Church itself, and it has been suggested that they well understood this. Abels argues that, at the time of the death of Archbishop Deusdedit, Oswiu of Northumbria was at a critical time of his career. His suzerainty over the southern kingdoms was beginning to wane, he was faced by the growing power of Mercia, and his own son had challenged his authority by insisting that Oswiu resolve the Easter issue.[77] One of the means by which Oswiu planned to reinforce his authority was to present a candidate for the archbishopric, and to have his candidate chosen over the others. By doing this, he would

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[76] See above pp.13,17

[77] The Irish used the old method for calculating the date of Easter, which resulted in celebrating the holy day on the Sunday which fell during the week of Nisan 14-20, according to the Jewish calendar. The Romans, on the other hand, altered this system slightly so that Easter would be celebrated on the Sunday of the week of Nisan 15-21. The reason for this is that the Jewish Passover was celebrated on Nisan 14, and the Romans did not want their most holy of celebrations to coincide with that of the Jews. For the most part this would not result in conflict between the two systems, except for those years when the Sunday fell on Nisan 14; then the adherents of the Celtic and Roman traditions would celebrate Easter a week apart. See Mayr-Harting, pp.103-104

> not only secure the support of an important ecclesiastic, but would also dramatically assert his supremacy over the English kings. On the other hand, failure to choose the new primate would underline Oswiu's loss of power and prestige.[78]

This illustrates how, by Oswiu's time, interaction and cooperation with the Church had become as essential to English kingship as cooperation between pagan kings and their chief priests had been.

The early missionaries in England required the cooperation of the kings for a variety of reasons. First, in theory, the people would follow the example set by their king because of his traditional role in Germanic society as leader of the comitatus and sacral king. Second, royal support provided the Church with protection and financial aid, while the king's conversion set an example of behaviour for his people to follow. The Church simply could not survive in England without such royal patronage. However, it was not enough to win the support of individual kings; the Church had to make itself indispensable to kingship as a whole. It speaks volumes for the persuasive skill of the early missionaries, Augustine in particular, that they were able to alter the kings' perception of the nature of kingship enough to bend them to their will. By using those skills, the missionaries were able to make the kings understand intuitively that sacrality was no longer inherent in kingship. Henceforth, kings would have to earn their sanctity by working in concert with the Church. Such manipulation was not the sole prerogative of the Church, however, as kings soon learned how to manipulate the mechanisms of the ecclesiastical institution for their own ends. Despite such royal machinations, Rome's plan was ultimately successful.

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[78] Abels, p.13

Having secured the cooperation of the most powerful members of English society, the ecclesiasts could begin to establish an infrastructure for the English Church.

Chapter Three

Establishing the Infrastructure: Organization and Higher Education

In Roman tradition, religious education was an essential element of conversion, and one which was inherent in a well organized ecclesiastical system. Ecclesiasts were more comfortable with the idea of educating their members within the community of a unified Christian Church headed by the Bishop of Rome, because this provided some consistency and ensured that the theology that was being taught within the system could be monitored to some extent. This system allowed orthodox members to guide and reprimand those who strayed too far from the doctrine accepted by the religious community as a whole. For educational purposes as well as administrative, when introducing the system to a new people, it was necessary to establish as quickly as possible a diocesan system which would incorporate the new members into the community and which would provide an atmosphere conducive to the transmission of ideas.[79]

In the Roman mind, the organization of a diocesan system along with the creation of educational facilities within that system was a crucial step in the conversion of the English. It was necessary for the system to be in place so that the Church could supervise and regulate the Anglo-Saxons' internalization of the Christian religion. This process was slowed only by a lack of strong leadership in the English Church in the middle

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[79] O'Neill, pp.17-18

decades of the seventh century, a problem that was rectified by the appointment of Theodore of Tarsus to the Archbishopric of Canterbury. The Roman desire for organization and conformity, however, brought the Romans in England into conflict with the Irish, whose primary concern lay less with the overreaching unification and organization of their Church and more with the care of souls. While the Romans also evinced their concern for the care of souls, the Irish did not share their conviction that a large ecclesiastical institution had to be constructed before souls could be saved.

Although the difference between the Roman and Irish ideals carried the potential for serious conflict, as was seen in Whitby in 664, the disparity between the Churches did not prove to be a great hindrance to the conversion process. Indeed, at least in regard to bringing Christianity to the English people, the two complemented each other well and gave rise to a perception of Christianity that was uniquely Anglo-Saxon. To understand how the missionaries brought the English from the superficial and conditional stages of conversion to the spiritual, it is necessary to study the transitional stage in which they established their educational facilities as well as the Romans' meeting with the Irish, which would prove to be very fruitful for the Anglo-Saxons.

Once the educational facilities were in place, the process of converting the common people began in earnest. Local boys were brought into the religious community, as Bede was, and they became scholars and priests, and, in some cases, rose to become abbots, bishops, and, in death, even saints—as Guthlac and Cuthbert had done. Social climbers allowed their sons to be educated by the clergy which, over time, became a process of assimilation that permitted sincere conversion to trickle down to all social levels.

Gregory had planned to establish a diocesan system in England as quickly as possible, and sent instructions to Augustine, outlining how he wished it to be done. He wanted Augustine to consecrate twelve bishops who would be subject to the Archbishop of London. He also wished there to be an Archbishop of York who would also consecrate twelve bishops for the northern region. Although neither archbishop would be subject to the other, whichever one had been in office longest would have seniority.[80]

A few attempts were made by Augustine to put Gregory's plans into effect. During the archbishop's lifetime one see was established at London and another at Rochester. Given the circumstances, however, Augustine was obliged to establish his archbishopric at Canterbury instead of London. Although he likely intended to relocate to London eventually, the conversion of the East Saxons was never secure enough during his lifetime to allow him to do so. Over the course of the seventh century, new dioceses were established as Christianity gained a foothold in the various kingdoms. The pattern that evolved generally saw one diocese per kingdom. Many of these dioceses proved to be short-lived, however, and others fell vacant. The problem was exacerbated in 664 when a plague struck England and claimed the lives of several high-ranking churchmen, including three bishops—Damian of Rochester, Tuda of Northumbria, and Cedd of Essex—as well as Archbishop Deusdedit of Canterbury. When the English candidate for the archbishopric died on his way to Rome to be consecrated, Pope Vitalian chose a candidate of his own and sent Theodore of Tarsus to England.

Theodore was an excellent choice, for he had studied at

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[80] *HE*, i.29

Tarsus and Athens, both of which were notable centres of learning, and he was reputed to be a great scholar of Greek and Latin as well as a philosopher. Although he was by training an "Orthodox of the East," once he was chosen by the Pope to be the new Archbishop of Canterbury and received his holy orders, his loyalties lay with the Roman Church.[81]

When he arrived in England, Theodore found the diocesan system to be in a deplorable state. There were only three bishops in the entire region, and one of them, Wilfrid of Ripon, was not destined to be on amiable terms with Theodore. Further, the educational facilities were sorely lacking. There were several centres for learning in England, such as Lindisfarne and Malmesbury, although each of these was an Irish foundation. There were also Dunwich and Canterbury, both Roman foundations, as well as smaller local centres.[82]

At any of these places a student could learn his letters, Latin grammar and basic Christian doctrine that would be sufficient to preach to the lay people. Although Whitelock and Godfrey suggest that these early schools were sophisticated enough to turn out scholars who were sufficiently qualified to become bishops and archbishops,[83] it is clear that many

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[81] Godfrey, pp.128-129

[82] Augustine had established a school at Canterbury which remained small but functional throughout the seventh century. When Sigeberht became king of East Anglia, he wished to establish a school for boys, much like the ones he had seen, and perhaps even attended, while living as an exile in Gaul, and he had Bishop Felix help him with this task. Felix himself was a Burgundian, but he had been in Kent for some time, so he modelled Sigeberht's school after the one in Canterbury, and brought teachers from there to educate the boys of his school. Godfrey suggests that the school must have been located in Dunwich, although there is no definite evidence for this, p.199; see also *HE*, iii.18.

[83] Whitelock, *BES* p.189; Godfrey, p.1994

Englishmen did not consider the schools to be satisfactory. These were the men who looked elsewhere to obtain a classical education, many of whom went to Ireland. Among these men, Bede mentions the noblemen Æthelhun, Ecgbert and Æthelwin, who studied at Rathmelsigi.[84] Chad had been one of Ecgbert's companions during this time.[85] There were also Willibrord and Hewald the Black, who studied in Ireland then went to preach on the Continent. Similarly, Tuda, who later became Bishop of Lindisfarne, had been trained by the Southern Irish. Finally, there was one Hæmgils, who left Melrose to live with a hermit in Ireland.[86]

Theodore enthusiastically undertook the great task of raising the English Church to the Continental standard. Of immediate importance was the problem of the paucity of bishops, for at the time, there were only the simoniacal Wine, and Wilfrid, who was indignant over the loss of his Northumbrian diocese which had been handed over to the third bishop, Chad. To resolve the situation, Theodore created the see of Lichfield for Chad, so that he might minister to the Mercians, and the see of York was returned to Wilfrid. Theodore left Wine in London for the time being, and also consecrated three new bishops, Putta for Rochester, Bisi for Dunwich and a short time later, Leutherius for Winchester. By 670, there was at least one bishop for every Christian kingdom in England.

However, Theodore was still far from satisfied with the state of affairs. From the time of Gregory's death, the conversion had been a rather haphazard, unorganized

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[84] Rathmelsigi is an Irish name, but its exact location has not been identified. *HE*, iii.27

[85] *HE*, iii.27

[86] McNamara, pp.26-27

achievement, largely the result of enthusiastic missionaries who had enjoyed little leadership from Rome and who certainly had acted as a series of individuals rather than a team. Those of the Celtic tradition, such as Aidan, Cuthbert, Fursa, and Chad, were, of course, not answerable to the Pope. Even those of the Roman tradition who arrived in England, with the exception of Augustine, largely came of their own volition, as did Birinus, the first bishop of the West Saxons, who desired to be a missionary and went to Pope Honorius to see if he could recommend a tribe of pagans who were in need of conversion.[87] Similarly, Agilberht, bishop of Dorchester, had wandered into Wessex after studying in Ireland for a few years, and Felix, the first bishop of Dunwich, had come to Canterbury to offer his services to Archbishop Honorius, who sent him to East Anglia in response to King Sigeberht's request for a bishop.[88] It was Theodore who, for the first time since Gregory's death, gave the missionary effort in England some unification and direction, for which Bede praises the Archbishop so highly.[89]

Theodore's efforts towards unification came to fruition in 672 when he called the Synod of Hertford, the first council that was attended by representatives of the entire English Church. It was at this council that Theodore brought the Church into line with Continental practices. Synodal government, for example, was the norm within the Continental Church, as was the recording of the decisions of the council in the form of canons, not only to make the process more formal, but also to record the decisions to prevent later misunderstandings. At Hertford, ten canons were prescribed,

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[87] Gallyon, p.3

[88] Stenton, p.116

[89] *HE*, iv.2

and the bishops present each signed their name at the bottom of the document.[90]

These canons indicate the direction that the Church would take under Theodore's guidance. They confirmed the decision made at Whitby to adhere to the Roman method of calculating the date of Easter, and they clarified the rights of the bishops in respect to one another. Specifically, the bishops were not to interfere in the governance of each other's dioceses; in order of precedence, they would "take rank according to the time and order of their consecration;" monks and clergy were no longer allowed to wander about, but had to stay within the confines of their own monasteries unless they had letters from their own abbot; and, when travelling, bishops and clergy were not to "exercise any priestly function without the permission of the bishops in whose diocese they are known to be."[91] These decrees heralded the end of the loose discipline that enabled individual missionaries to set off on their own to save souls and minister to those already saved. From that time on, such tasks were to be supervised by the correct authorities and undertaken in an organized manner.

The synod also placed new emphasis on the diocesan system. The canons from Hertford made it clear that diocesan boundaries were to play a greater role in the administration of the English Church. Nevertheless, Theodore had even greater ambitions for English diocesan organization, for he was dissatisfied with the great size of some of the English dioceses. The see of Lichfield, for example, extended from the Welsh border to the Wash, and from the Thames to the Humber. Similarly, the see of York included all of Bernicia and Deira.

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[90] Godfrey, p.132

[91] The text from the Synod of Hertford is found in *HE*, iv.5

There are several reasons why this troubled Theodore. First, Theodore shared Gregory the Great's sentiments concerning the dignity of bishops. They were to be grand enough to command the respect of their people, but not so grand that it hindered their ability to remain humble at heart; having such a large region under his authority might overly inflate a bishop's ego:

> ...quia et ista saepe per tumorem cor inquinant, et illa per dolorem purgant... Nam plerumque adversitatis magisterio sub disciplina cor premitur: quod si as regiminis culmen eruperit, in elationem protinus usu gloariae permutatur.[92]

Second, it was the bishop's primary duty to see to the pastoral care of his people, in person:

> ...quia cum causam populi electus praesul suscipit, quasi as aegrum medicus accedit.[93]

Regions as large as Mercia and Northumbria were far too large to be tended to by one man. Finally, Theodore was from the eastern Mediterranean, where the dioceses were geographically very small, and consequently he would have considered a region the size of Mercia much too large to contain only one see.[94]

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[92] (for often through pride man defiles his heart and through sorrow he cleanses it... for the heart is often humbled by the lessons of adversity, yet if the man is raised to a position of power, the enjoyment of glory immediately causes his heart to be altered completely.) Gregory the Great, *Regulae Pastoralis Liber - Pars Prima*, in *Patrologia Cursus Completus Series Latina*. vol. 77, *Gregorius Magnus*. Ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1896) c.3

[93] (for a bishop receives certain needful people just as a physician tends to the sick.) *Regulae Pastoralis Liber*, c.9

[94] Mayr-Harting, pp.135-136

At Hertford, Theodore introduced the idea of dividing the dioceses, but met with a great deal of opposition from the bishops present. Of interest to them, of course, were the revenues that they received from their dioceses, revenues which would be reduced considerably by Theodore's scheme. However Mayr-Harting argues that of greater importance to the bishops was their episcopal dignity. He suggests that many of the bishops had Gaulish connections, and that in Gaul large dioceses and grandiose bishops were the norm. For example, Eddius describes the ceremony of Wilfrid's consecration in Gaul:

> praeparantes ei navem et auxilia hominum et pecuniae multitudinem, ita ut valde honorifice ad Galliae regionem pervenerit. Ibique statim conventio magna facta est non minus quam duodecim episcoporum catholicorum, e quibus unus erat Aegilberhtus episcopus. Qui omnes eum propter fidem suam indicatam gratanter et honorifice coram omni populo publice ordinaverunt et in sella aurea sedentem more eorum sursum elevaverunt, portantes manibus soli episcopi intra oratiorum, nullo alio attingente, hymnos canticaque in choro canentes.[95]

Such a glorious ceremony indicates that bishops were becoming too proud, as Gregory had feared they would. It is natural

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[95] ([the Northumbrian kings] prepared a ship for [Wilfrid] and gave him extra men and a great deal of money so that he might enter the region of Gaul with great honour. At this place there at once convened a large gathering with no less than twelve Catholic bishops, and one of them was Bishop Agilberht. When they heard his declaration of faith they joyously and in an honourable manner consecrated him before all the people there. Then, according to their custom, the bishops themselves, without aid, raised him in a golden chair, carrying him by hand into the oratorium, singing hymns and songs in chorus.) Eddius, c.12

that bishops who were accustomed to such great circumstance and dignity would resist Theodore's attempts to humble them by reducing the size of their dioceses.

Because of their obstinacy in the matter, the issue was left unresolved at Hertford. Yet Theodore bided his time and eventually succeeded in dividing the dioceses gradually. When Bishop Putta died, Theodore reduced the see of Dunwich and created a second see, that of Elmham. He ousted Winfrith on the grounds of disobedience and divided his see of Lichfield into Worcester and Hereford. In Northumbria, he arbitrarily divided Wilfrid's see in four, York, Lindisfarne, Hexham and Withern--an act which precipitated a lengthy dispute with Wilfrid and eventually called for the intervention of the Pope. Theodore also created a new diocese in the north for the Picts after the Battle of Nechtansmere, when this region ceased to be under Northumbrian influence. Finally, after Theodore's death, the see of Wessex was divided into the dioceses of Winchester and Sherborne. In spite of the bishops' resistance, Theodore's strong will prevailed in the end.[96]

The diocesan system that has been discussed hitherto was characteristic of the Roman Church. The Irish, however, who also had a significant role to play in the Christianization of the English, had a different attitude toward diocesan organization. They did have some organization within their own Church but it was different, and more suited to Celtic society than was the Roman system. Therefore, in order to understand the role that the Irish holy men had to play in the final stages of the English conversion, it is helpful to look at the traditions of the Celtic Church in order to show how it differed from the establishment that Theodore strove to

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[96] Godfrey, pp.133-134

organize in England during the late seventh century.

The Celts had always been particularly tolerant of other religions, and had developed their own religion by incorporating foreign elements into it. The Druids, for example, actually belonged to the aboriginal, non-Indo-European inhabitants of Ireland, and when the Celts arrived there in the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. they adopted the Druids and made them part of their own culture. Similarly, when the Christians first began to appear on the shores of Ireland in the late fourth century, the Eastern Christian influences that were trickling into Ireland were not being condemned by the Druidic order.[97]

In fact, in many ways, Celtic Christianity can be seen as a fusion of Druidic practices and Christian beliefs. The Druidic order always had a great affinity for Christianity for several reasons. First, the pagan Celts worshipped a triune god; symbols of a three-headed god have been found both in Ireland and on the Continent. The three heads belong to Tanaros, who is the father of the gods in Celtic mythology, to Lugh, his son, who is the fire god, and to Brigit, who was the divine virgin. The concept of the Christian trinity was readily acceptable to the pagan Celts.

Secondly, the Druids were considered to be clairvoyant. According to the legends, some high-ranking Druids witnessed, through their second sight, both the birth and death of Jesus, and some saw Brigit holding the baby Jesus in her lap. As a result, when Christians first began to appear on the island, the Druidic order was prepared to accept their teaching and incorporate it into their own religion. Celtic bards began to include more and more Christian content in their songs, and the Druidic order gradually gave way to a Christian order of monks

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[97] Jakob Streit, *Sun and Cross* (Edinburgh, 1984) pp.58-61

and priests. Further, since this development started well before the arrival of Patrick, it was devoid of the dogma and ecclesiastical power-struggles associated with the Roman Church.[98]

Although the Roman Church itself was not completely organized in the fourth century, it was well on its way to becoming a strong episcopal institution which was characteristically practical and dogmatic. At the same time, the Eastern Church was giving rise to the monastic movement which soon spread across Europe.[99] It is likely that individuals or small groups of adherents of both the Eastern and Western traditions were straying into Ireland in the late fourth century, coming into contact with the highly spiritual Druidic order, and that the Eastern, mystical style of Christianity held greater appeal for the Celts, as it more closely resembled their own religion than Roman Catholicism did.

Perhaps the best way to describe the Celtic mysticism of which the Romans disapproved is to take a brief look at two prominent members of the early Celtic Church: Patrick and Pelagius. Concerning Patrick, there is some controversy. Chadwick and Mayr-Harting have accepted the traditional view that Patrick was fundamentally a Roman who went to Britain as an emissary to bring the Celts into line with the Roman Church.[100] Although Patrick's first contacts with Christianity were in Celtic homes, his own as a boy in Britain and in

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[98] Streit, pp.65-69

[99] Chadwick, *Age of Saints*, pp.8-9

[100] Chadwick, p.23; Mayr-Harting, pp.60,78

Ireland where he lived with a Christian family,[101] both Chadwick and Mayr-Harting have accepted that he was a Roman at heart. In fact, Chadwick insists upon it, arguing that Patrick never mentioned monasticism or mysticism in his writings. He was raised in a family of Roman officials before he was taken to Ireland, and later he was trained in Gaul, where he internalized the dogma and the ideal of diocesan organization. In Ireland, he dutifully adhered to the lessons he had learned in Roman Britain and in Gaul and attempted to organize the Irish Church according to a Continental diocesan system with his seat at Armagh.[102]

Alternatively, Jakob Streit notes that there is no historical evidence that associates Patrick with any specific religious house, that he worked predominantly in the north, or that he had any particular connection with Armagh at all. He suggests that, although Patrick was trained in Gaul, he was affiliated with the Island of Lérins, an important Gallic Christian centre which was heavily influenced by Eastern monks and was a centre for the Pelagian heresy, which will be discussed shortly.[103]

Patrick returned to Britain late in his life, having been sent there by Pope Celestine to investigate and dispel the Pelagian heresy. While in Britain, Patrick was overcome by a desire to return to Ireland. He himself wrote that one of the people with whom he had lived called to him in a dream, begging him to return to Ireland:

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[101] For Patrick's early Christian influences, see Patrick's *Confessio*, cc.1&16. See also Muirchu's *Life* of Saint Patrick, c.1

[102] Chadwick, p.23

[103] Streit, p.168; See also Hodgkin, p.247

> Et ibi scilicet vidi in visu noctis virum venientem quasi de Hiberione, cui nomen Victoricus, cum epistolis innumerabilibus, et dedit mihi unam ex his et legi principium epistolae continentem 'Vox Hiberionacum,' et recitabam principium epistolae putabam ipso momento audire vocem ipsorum qui erant iuxta silvam Focluti quae est prope mare occidentale, et sic exclamaverunt, quasi ex uno ore: 'Rogamus te, sancte puer, ut venias et adhuc ambulas inter nos;' et valde compunctus sum corde et amplius non potui legere.[104]

Patrick's sentiment is reminiscent of the Celtic belief that holy men had second sight and of going into voluntary exile in order to do penance for sin, both of which are Celtic rather than Roman traits.

Celtic mysticism also manifested itself in the person of Pelagius, the father of Britain's notorious fifth-century heresy. Pelagius advocated that there was no original sin, that when a soul was conceived it was a divine creation and therefore entirely devoid of evil. As a result, it was both possible and desirable that men could live their lives entirely without sin. M. Forthomme Nicholson points out that Pelagius' idea was not new, that it was accepted by the Church until Augustine of Hippo wrote his treatise claiming that, because of

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[104] (And it was there [Britain], to be sure, that I saw in a dream at night a man, whose name was Victoricus, coming as if from Ireland with many letters and he gave one of them to me. I read the beginning of the letter which was entitled 'The Voice of the Irish' and at the moment that I pondered that first line, I heard the voice of those who were beside the forest of Foclut, which is near the western sea. And they cried thus, as if of one voice, 'we call to you, holy boy, that you come and walk among us again.' And I was so struck in my heart that I could read no longer.) St. Patrick, *Confessio,* c.23

Adam's transgression, all humanity was tainted with sin.[105] Pelagius refused to accept this doctrine, so in 418 the African Church fathers had the British theologian condemned and exiled from Rome.

Pelagius' teaching was more optimistic than Augustine's, and Nicholson attributes this to the fact that he was a Celt. Like Streit, Nicholson has shown that the Druids had a love of nature and believed that anything divinely created was inherently good, a belief that was ingrained in the Celtic psyche.[106] Pelagius was raised in a Celtic Christian home and was greatly influenced by this positive outlook. Hence his belief that God was just and would not arbitrarily single out some souls for damnation.[107] The Pelagian heresy is an early indication of the innate cultural differences that would have to be considered again when the two traditions met two and a half centuries later in Northumbria.

A further divergence between the Romans and the Celts was their opposing attitudes towards monasticism. During the fourth and fifth centuries, the monastic movement was spreading into western Europe. John Cassian, Abbot of Saint Victor's in Marseilles, established one of the earliest monasteries in Gaul in the fifth century. His monasticism focused on two things: that the monasteries were to be governed by an abbot, and that they were to be centres of learning.[108] The problem was that such monastic organization, with its emphasis on the abbot, was

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[105] M. Forthomme Nicholson, "Celtic Theology: Pelagius," in Mackey, p.396

[106] Nicholson, p.401; Streit pp.74-76

[107] Nicholson, p.401

[108] Mayr-Harting, p.84

developing independently of Roman episcopal organization.[109]

Yet this independence is what made monasticism attractive to the Celts. Ireland was rural, so it was not well suited to an urban diocesan system. Unlike in the territorial Roman Church, a Celtic bishop was under his abbot's authority, no territorial or diocesan boundaries existed, and monks were not prevented from travelling as were those under the auspices of the Roman Church, particularly in England after the Synod of Hertford. The Celts had their own liturgy and methods for penitential discipline. Celtic monks lived in private cells rather than in communal dormitories, they had a different tonsure, and they used their own means for calculating the date of Easter.

Nevertheless, Chadwick is correct in writing that there was no serious schism between the two Churches, even though her explanation for this phenomenon is somewhat misleading. As a result of Ireland's relative isolation from the Continent, she argues, the Celtic Church had lost the guiding influence of Roman organization and began to stagnate while the Roman Church continued to develop. During this time the Roman Church consolidated its organization of the Gallic provinces, it formally began to recognize the bishop of Rome as having authority over all other bishops, and it adopted a new system for calculating the date of Easter. As a result, Chadwick argues, the Roman missionaries, upon encountering the members of the Celtic Church, had to deal with a small, backward group of Christians on the edge of the known world.[110]

Undeniably, the Churches worshipped the same deity, both believed in Christ, and used essentially the same biblical

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[109] Chadwick, p.30

[110] Chadwick, p.66

texts for the basis of their studies. Yet beyond this there were some differences; the divergence between the Churches certainly happened. Is it correct, however, to accept Chadwick's suggestion that the Celtic Church did not develop at all? The evidence from the sixth and seventh centuries, including that presented by Chadwick herself, shows that the Church changed its appearance quite drastically and quickly. Irish society was not urban. Patrick's scheme for establishing episcopal centres was admirable, but impractical, and the Irish soon revised it, bringing themselves even further away from conformity with the Roman Church.

The system the Irish developed was called coarbship. By this system a local clan would allocate a particular piece of land to a holy man, who would be able to pass it on to his heirs, generally his own kin, although it was understood that the land was not held privately but rather belonged to the whole clan. This system was in place in pre-Christian times, and was carried on after conversion.[111] The Christian priest would establish a small monastic community on this land, of which he would be the abbot. The local bishop would dwell in the monastery and would be subject to the abbot and to the rules of the house. Members of the house, after a period of training, might set out and found daughter houses. This would form a confederation of monasteries, which was called a *paruchia,* and which was under the general authority of the abbot of the mother house. One such *paruchia* was formed from Iona with its daughter houses of Lindisfarne and Jarrow.[112]

The natural successor to the monastic movement both in

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[111] Peter Berresford Ellis, *MacBeth: High King of Scotland 1040-57 AD* (London) p.20

[112] Chadwick, p.64

Ireland and the Eastern Mediterranean was the anchorite movement, which can be dated to the last half of the sixth century. The devotion of the anchorites and their love for God compelled them to go on pilgrimage, which could take several different forms. For some, it meant travelling in order to do missionary work; for others, it meant going into voluntary exile to separate oneself from home and family, to be alone with God and to contemplate; for yet others it was a spiritual pilgrimage which did not entail travelling, but rather a deep, concentrated study. For all, the ultimate aim was to contemplate, actively to adore God, and to attain the Christ-like perfection spoken of by Pelagius, although the most holy of these men would deny that they had ever come close to attaining that perfection.[113]

The anchorites were well-known for their asceticism and their austerity. Nonetheless, their lifestyles were regulated such that they could not take pride in their austerity. When it came to food, they ate modest yet sufficient portions. Their diets generally consisted of such staples as bread, perhaps with a little honey, fish, cheese, eggs and apples. As a matter of principle they refrained from consuming meat or beer. Some went to extremes, of course, such as limiting themselves to herbs and water, but such practice was not the norm in Irish monasteries.[114]

By the eighth century, there was growing concern about the anchorites. Some who went off on their travels were not really doing it for the love of God; their interest was rather to travel and see the world under a holy guise. In the monasteries as well things were becoming rather too

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[113] Chadwick, p.82

[114] Mayr-Harting p.82

comfortable—some monks had taken to eating hearty meals, sleeping all night and wearing luxurious clothing. As a result, there was more emphasis placed on spiritual pilgrimage, which encouraged monks to stay within their monasteries, where their abbots could keep an eye on them, and where they could concentrate on seeking God through study.[115]

For many, this sedentary devotion translated into doing scribal work, copying out the important manuscripts and turning them into the beautiful works of art for which the Celtic Church is famous. During this period a great emphasis was placed on studying the Church fathers, and this created a demand for manuscripts, which the monks produced at a comparatively rapid rate. Charlemagne's scholars are often given credit for producing a new script, the Carolingian minuscule. Less attention is paid to the Irish script that was in use at least a century before Charlemagne's birth. This is the insular half-uncial, which the Irish developed from combining the Roman cursive script (a rather messy shorthand) and Frankish uncials (round upper case letters, adapted for the pen and paper as opposed to chisel and stone). The Irish perfected their script by about 700. The best examples are to be found in the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne gospels.[116] How could a Church that produced such artwork be said to have stagnated?

Thus there were some important differences between the Roman and Celtic cultural traditions, and it is likely that when the two met in Northumbria during the reigns of Oswald and

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[115] Peter O'Dwyer, "Celtic Monks and the Culdee Reform," in Mackey, p.147

[116] Alfred Fairbank, *A Book of Scripts* (Penguin ed., 1968) pp.11-12

Oswiu, those differences caused a great deal of misunderstanding. There was certainly some tension that resulted from disagreements over such issues as the Easter question, which Bede stresses as one of the major points of dissension between the Romans and the Celts.[117] Indeed, it was this issue that proved to the focal point of the struggle when the situation became untenable and had to be resolved at Whitby in 664. However, as Abels has argued, the actual catalyst for Oswiu's calling of the Council may have been more political in nature.[118] Regardless of the conflict between Oswiu and his son, however, it was at Whitby that the Roman Church won a nominal political victory over the Irish. Roman organization and ritual prevailed, but the Irish were hardly defeated.

Indeed, in terms of cultural development, it cannot be considered a Roman victory at all. Although Celtic influences were strong in England, the differences between the two cultures were not so irreconcilable that they would hinder the conversion of the English people. In fact, the situation was quite the reverse, for the two actually complemented each other quite well. This is clearly illustrated by the meeting of the educational traditions of both cultures. As English scholars acquired educations that were strongly influenced by both traditions, they produced a culture of learning that came to be known as characteristically Anglo-Saxon.

Until the sixth century the schools that were to be found in Europe were still largely privately owned and run. In them, a student could obtain a basic classical education, much like that which was available during the heyday of the Roman Empire: he would study Latin grammar, rhetoric, and textual criticism,

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[117] *HE*, iii.25.

[118] Abels, pp.6-11

while using the works written by the classical Latin authors such as Virgil, Pliny, Sallust, etc. At that time, young men interested in obtaining a religious education had to go to local clerics and study the catechism with them. Gradually, however, the Church started taking a greater role in the education of its younger members, and in the sixth century it was possible for an aspiring cleric to receive his entire education at a religious centre, as did Gregory of Tours, the earliest example of such a scholar.[119] Indeed, Whitelock has written that by A.D. 600, it was expected that each bishopric would be furnished with a school, and that Augustine accordingly established a cathedral school at Canterbury for the religious instruction of young Englishmen who wished to join the Church. Such schools were also established at Rochester and in East Anglia.[120]

In these cathedral schools, the boys would first learn the basics of Latin phonology and orthography, and then they would learn Latin grammar while studying the Psalter. O'Neill suggests that this was a common method throughout Western Christendom. The pupils would either take home a wax tablet onto which their master had written a psalm and memorize the psalm for the next lesson, or they would write the psalms themselves as the master dictated.[121] This served a double purpose in that they would learn Latin while memorizing the psalms. Once this was complete, they would study the Gospels, and then their basic religious education would be complete.

At this point, the direction their studies would take them depended upon the religious centre to which they were

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[119] Godfrey, pp.198-200

[120] Whitelock, *BES*, p.189

[121] O'Neill, p.15

affiliated, and the books available at that centre. At Malmesbury, for example, where Aldhelm received his early education, the scholars maintained their Irish tradition under the auspices of Abbot Maildubh. They had at their disposal Old Latin Vulgate texts, apocryphal works such as the 'Gospel of Nicodemus' and the 'Acts of Pilate' which had been proscribed by the Roman ecclesiastical councils, several Greek works in Latin translation, as well as some scholarly works written by Irishmen, such as the Irish Augustine's 'Of the Wonders of Holy Scripture' and a critical study of the works of Gregory the Great by Laidcend.[122] It is from studying such works that Aldhelm developed his typically Celtic love of word puzzles, as well as his "passion for the construction of riddles—which reveal a love of nature and an eagerness to delve into the mysteries of ordinary daily life,"[123] which is, again, a decidedly Celtic characteristic.

At the time when Aldhelm was studying under Maildubh, it was common for English scholars to travel abroad to obtain higher educations. This is indicated in a letter that Aldhelm wrote to Eahfrid, in which he wonders why so many English students travelled to Ireland when there were teachers in England who were qualified to teach Greek and Latin, namely Theodore and Hadrian at Canterbury.[124] Certainly, before Theodore's time, English schools were not renowned for their educational facilities, as is evidenced by the great number of

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[122] Godfrey, p.201

[123] Godfrey, p.202

[124] The letter is translated in Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, eds., *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979) pp.160-164

students who felt obliged to go abroad.[125]

With the arrival of Theodore and Hadrian, the English educational system was markedly improved. At his own school in Canterbury, Theodore made it possible for students like Aldhelm, who relocated there in his mid-life, to study Greek as well as Latin, astronomy, astrology, verse, metre and music—predominantly the Gregorian chant, which was very popular in England at that time. Theodore also made the scriptures more accessible to those who studied them, if only in that he was familiar with the region in which the scriptures are set. He could answer questions concerning the topography of the Eastern Mediterranean, and describe the flora and fauna whose names appear in the Bible but were unfamiliar to the English.

Finally, when Hadrian assumed the responsibility for the Canterbury school, he freed Benedict Biscop from his duties there and made it possible for him to travel to the Continent. Much has been said about the great wealth of literature that Benedict Biscop brought back, and about the library he furnished at the joint monasteries of Jarrow and Monkwearmouth. It was this library that provided Bede with many of the sources that he used for his own work.[126]

The educational systems available at Malmesbury, Canterbury and Jarrow illustrate how the Roman and Celtic traditions supplemented each other, as many English scholars had received their education from both, as had Aldhelm, whose own work revealed the Irish background in his education, even though his loyalties were decidedly Roman. Similarly, Bede received his early training at a Celtic centre, and in his work

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[125] See above, p.46

[126] Whitelock, *BES*, p.191

he betrays his admiration for his Celtic forbears even while advocating an adherence to Roman tradition.

Indeed, it would appear that the English were well aware of the Irish influence in their scholarly work and were not eager to eradicate it. In spite of the Roman proscription of the apocrypha, even in the ninth and tenth centuries the English were still reading and making copies of Irish apocryphal works.[127] For example, there is a poem, written in Ireland in the late ninth century, the "Psalter of the Quatrains," which draws its ideas from the Old and New Testament, as well as from the apocryphal gospels. It has been described as "full of native colour... it is just the sort of literature, Christian in subject and Irish in treatment, that the Céli dé school aimed at but seldom achieved."[128] Also at this time, English scribes were copying down Celtic charms in the margins of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.[129]

The educational system which had developed in England by Bede's time had clearly incorporated elements of both the Roman and Irish traditions. This was not exactly what Theodore had had in mind when he began organizing the English dioceses that would provide the infrastructure for an educational system. Yet the influence of the Irish did not hinder the development of that system either. On the contrary, their presence meant that students had a broader range of subjects to study. Indeed, many students took advantage of this opportunity to

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[127] Rudolph Willard, *Two Apocrypha in Old English Homilies, in Beiträge zur Englischen Philologie*, Ed. Max Förster. Nos.30-35 (Leipzig, 1935)

[128] Written by David Greene, quoted in O'Dwyer, p.165

[129] Raymond Grant, *Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41: The Loricas and the Missal*, in *Costerus: Essays in English and American Language and Literature* 27(1978)

study from both traditions. This assimilation created a new generation of scholars, like Bede and Aldhelm, who were neither Roman nor Irish, but rather Anglo-Saxon. It was such men, educated in English schools, who carried Christianity into the countryside and preached to the populace as a whole.

Chapter Four

Carrying Christianity to the Laity

Although higher education was fundamental in turning the Anglo-Saxons into a Christian people, it must be remembered that this type of education was limited to those who entered the Church or who made a career out of scolasticism. What of the rest of the population for whose souls Gregory was so concerned? Initially they were instructed by itinerant bishops, priests and Irish ascetics. As Bede wrote,

> et siquis sacerdotum in uicum forte deuenerit, mox congregati in unum uicani uerbum uitae ab illo expetere curabant. Nam neque alia ipsis sacerdotibus aut clericis uicos adeundi, quam praedicandi baptizandi informos uisitandi et, ut breuiter dicam, animas curandi causa fuit.[130]

These clerics travelled from their religious communities to preach to the laity and administer the sacrament.[131]

In the early Christian period, before permanent churches were built, the clerics chose prominent and conspicuous locations for the people to congregate, such as wells, markets,

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[130] (and if a priest came to a village, the people congregated in one place, hoping to hear the word of life from him, for priests and clerics came to such places if only for the sake of preaching, baptizing and, in short, caring for souls.) *HE*, iii.26

[131] Foot, p.43

crossroads, or at well-known landmarks. At these places they established marks, generally the sign of the cross, to catch the attention of the folk, and let them know that it was a designated meeting place.[132] Initially, small signs were set up, such as a mark on a well or a wooden cross hung from a branch of a tree. If the site continued to remain of importance, more permanent monuments were erected. In the life of St. Willibald, it is written that,

> it is the ancient custom of the Saxon nation, on the estate of some of their nobles and great men to erect, not a church, but the sign of the Holy Cross, dedicated to God, beautifully and honourably adorned, and erected on high for the common use of daily prayer.[133]

Many of these crosses still stand, such as the Ruthwell cross, which now stands in the Mount Kedar Parish Church about ten miles from Dumfries. This cross, which stands almost eighteen feet high, was likely originally erected in the clearing of a forest, as its original Old English name 'Roodwald' would

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[132] Such crosses were also set up to mark the limits of church property, and appear in charter bounds, where they are referred to as gilded crosses, wooden crosses, stone crosses, or even simply as a "Christ symbol" (William O. Stevens, *The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons* (New York, 1904) p.57). One such reference is found in a grant of land at Stoke Prior, Worcs., made by Uhtred, *regulus* of the Hwicce, to St. Mary's Minster, dated 770. The boundary clause begins, "Ærest fram myðan in cyrstel mæl ac. Of cyrstel mæl ac in east ende teoue lege..." (First from the confluence to the crucifix oak, from the crucifix oak to the east end of the clearing...) The reference is printed in Hooke, pp.65-66

[133] From the *Life of St. Willibald*, as it is quoted in Stevens, p.59

suggest.[134] Stevens argues that such crosses served as a places of worship, and also consecrated the ground if a church were later built beside it.[135]

The problem with ministering to the needs of the Christian community in this manner was that it was haphazard and unorganized. There was also some debate concerning who was actually responsible for caring for the laity; the question arose in England and on the Continent whether all men of God were obliged to teach the gospel, or if that was a specialized task to be performed by a chosen few trained particularly for it. Over the course of the seventh century on the Continent, a clear distinction came to be made between the duties of monks and priests: some of the early rules, such as the *Regularis Magistri* made it clear that monks were not to be ordained as priests. Since only ordained priests could administer the sacraments and conduct Mass, it came to be that even in monastic communities priests would have to be brought in from outside to perform these duties.

In Ireland, however, different conditions made it necessary for the monks to assume a greater role in caring for the laity. Since bishops were monks themselves, and a greater

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[134] Grant, "Robert Burns and the Ruthwell Cross," *Burns Chronicle* 100(1991) p.88

[135] Stevens, pp.59-60. He also notes that while the custom of raising a standard cross was likely introduced from Rome, it was also an old Celtic custom to raise great stone obelisks to commemorate chieftains. "At a later period, when writing became known, the rough pillar was inscribed, in oghams, or in debased Latin characters, on the smooth side of the stone. After the introduction of Christianity the symbol of the cross was also often enclosed in a circle, the emblem of eternity. From these rude Christian monuments developed the graceful and elaborate ornamented crosses of the altar period. The tall shaft of these is all that remains of the obelisk, and, crowning this, the cross, generally coupled with the circle." pp.39-40

emphasis was placed on monastic organization, many ordained priests were also monks as well. Further, in the seventh century, the Irish were less strict than the Romans about itinerant clergy. Out of necessity, it was generally these *peregrini* who took on the task of administering to the needs of the laity on their travels.[136]

In England, there was some concern about clerics who wandered thus being improperly trained. This was a concern expressed by Bede in his letter to Egbert:

> Indeed, it is most certain that all who have studied the Latin language have also learned these well [i.e., the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the gospels]; but make the ignorant people—that is, those who are acquainted with no language but their own—say them in their own language and repeat them assiduously. This ought to be done, not only in the case of laymen... but also of those clerics or monks who are ignorant of the Latin language... On this account I myself have often given to many ignorant priests both of these, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, translated into the English language.[137]

Although Bede felt that pastoral care was everyone's duty, he wanted to see more properly trained clerics in the field. He encouraged Egbert to

> appoint several assistants for yourself in the sacred work, by ordaining priests and instituting teachers, who may devote themselves to preaching the word of God in

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[136] Amos, pp.167-168

[137] Bede's letter to Egbert, *EHD*, pp.737-738

the various villages.[138]

As a rule, bishops were generally much stricter, given their desire to be in greater control of pastoral care. Gregory had suggested that it was their duty to see to it; consequently, they felt it was their right to choose the clerics and monitor their activity. This was evidenced at the Council of Hertford, where the bishops were adamant that monks and clerics would not travel, and none would perform priestly duties without the authority of the bishop.[139] This implies that until the time of the council clerics and even monks were travelling at will, unrestricted by guidelines established by an organized institution. This point was further emphasized at the Council of Clofesho in 747, where it was decided that only ordained priests were to travel to see to the ministration of the laity, and again, they were to go only to those places assigned to them by their bishops.[140] In the seventh century, then, out of necessity, pastoral care was predominantly taken care of by those who were willing, regardless of their qualifications. It was not until the end of the century and into the eighth that the Roman Church assumed a greater role in organizing and monitoring the care that was given to the laity.

The main issue, however, was not so much who preached but what they were preaching. Unfortunately, as few sermons were written down in the seventh century and even fewer preserved, it is difficult to determine their content. Some scattered references in various documents, however, do give an indication

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[138] *EHD*, p.737

[139] *HE*, iv.5

[140] Foot, p.49

of how the Romans perceived their task of bringing Christianity to the people, as well as illustrating some ways they went about this task. When these references are brought together for examination, it becomes apparent that there were perhaps as many policies for broaching the subject of conversion with the pagans as there were missionaries in the field. For this aspect of the conversion process there does not appear to have been a discernable Roman policy in place. Rather, missionaries generally relied on their own intuition, with some guidance and advice offered by more consequential ecclesiasts, such as bishops, or even Popes.

Of great importance was that the missionaries recognize where the problem areas would lie. For his part, Gregory understood that there were problems inherent in introducing Christianity to a pagan people, particularly because it represented a doctrine and a set of values that were alien to the potential converts. Rather than have these technicalities hinder the conversion process, however, Gregory adopted a policy of tolerance and gentle persuasion to work around them. For example, he thought it best if Augustine be tolerant of any pagan customs that did not contradict the teachings of the Church.[141]

One obstacle was the fact that Germanic people had a cultural attachment to polytheism, an obstacle which manifested itself with Rædwald when he added an altar to Christ to his collection of heathen altars. Since his pagan mind was accustomed to the idea of polytheism, he may not have understood why the Christians considered multiple altars to be blasphemous. Besides, as Wallace-Hadrill points out, "in general, Germanic conversions of this period signified not the

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[141] Gregory's letter to Mellitus found in *HE*, i.30; the answers to Augustine's questions are in *HE*, i.27

total abandonment of the pagan gods but acceptance of an additional god."[142] A further indication that pagan shrines were not destroyed once Christianity had been accepted is found in *Beowulf*. In search of supernatural aid against Grendel's repeated attacks, the Danes prayed in vain to their pagan shrines.

Hwilum hie geheton
wigweorþunga
þæt him gastbona
wið þeodþpreaum.
hæþenra hyht;
in modsefan...

þurh sliðne nið
in fyres fæþm
wihte gewendan.[143]

æt hærgtrafum
wordum bædon
geoce gefremede
Swa wæs þeaw hyra,
helle gemundon

Wa bið þæm ðe sceal
sawle bescufan
frofre ne wenan

One might suggest that this passage was included to warn the Anglo-Saxon audience not to do the same. How could there be any danger of this unless people still had the shrines at their disposal?

Although Gregory was not prepared to tolerate blasphemy such as Rædwald's, he was careful about how the problem was to be broached. His suggestion to Augustine was that the English pagan temples, rather than being destroyed, ought to continue to be used once they had been cleansed with holy water and consecrated to God. His design was that:

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[142] Wallace-Hadrill, *EGK*, p.28

[143] (For a while they prayed to the idols in their heathen temples, asking that the slayer of souls help them overcome their great calamity. Such was their practice, the hope of heathens. Hell possessed their spirit... Woe be to those who shall thrust their souls into the fires' embrace during times of terrible persecution, those who do not know where to turn for consolation.) *Beowulf*, ll.175-180;183-186

> ut dum gens ipsa eadem fana sua non uidet destrui, de corde errorem deponat, et Deum uerum cognoscens ac adorans, ad loca quae consueuit familiarius concurrat.[144]

Similarly, he recommended that the people be allowed to have their feasts on their accustomed days, although the missionaries were to stress that they were to celebrate the saints rather than the pagan gods. As well, the animals that were customarily sacrificed on that day were to be slaughtered for food for the feast, and the emphasis put on giving thanks to God for his bounty rather than sacrifice to the old gods. Gregory felt that:

> Nam duris mentibus simul omnia abscidere impossibile esse non dubium est, quia et is, qui summum locum ascendere nititur, gradibus uel passibus, non autem saltibus eleuatur.[145]

Pope Boniface, however, took a less lenient approach to the problem of the heathen pantheon. In a letter to Edwin, he insisted that the worship of pagan gods be stopped completely and the idols be destroyed. In attempting to convince the king to convert, he tried to show him the fundamental difference between the Christian God and the pagan idols. God, Boniface explains, created mankind and all other things, therefore he should be worshipped accordingly. The idols, on the other

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[144] (so that when the people see that these shrines of theirs are not destroyed, they might drive error from their hearts and recognize and adore the true God, if they have recourse to the familiar places to which they are accustomed.) Letter to Mellitus found in *HE*, i.30

[145] (without doubt it is impossible to cut out everything from their uncouth minds at once, just as the one who strives to rise to the highest places does so by degrees and steps and not by leaps.) *HE*, i.30

hand, were created by men. They were made of corruptible material and would therefore decay and eventually disappear, whereas God is everlasting. Furthermore, they were inanimate objects, capable of doing neither harm nor good. They ought to be destroyed, for, as Boniface explains,

> ...eorum dissolutio corruptioque, quae numquam uiuentem spiritum habuit, nec sensibilitatem a suis factoribus potuit quolibet modo suscipere, uobis patenter insinuet, quam nihil erat quod eatenus colebatis, dum profecto meliores uos, qui spiritum uiuentum a Domino percepistis.[146]

A further obstacle was the problem of conflicting values. Christianity advocated a code of behaviour which was at odds with that of a warrior society. Personally, Gregory believed that the basis of all earthly rule was humility, that kings should never forget that their power came from God, and that what God gives, God can take away.[147] In a warrior society, on the other hand, kings were powerful because of their lineage, their prowess in battle, and their ability to maintain the loyalty of their followers through heroic gestures and acts of generosity. The Christian ideal of 'turning the other cheek' was alien to an Anglo-Saxon warrior.

So how would a warrior king reconcile himself to the Christian values? Wallace-Hadrill suggests that Gregory simply failed to mention many of these stipulations to

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[146] (the destruction and ruin of those things that never had a living spirit, nor ever could receive sense from their makers in any way, will clearly show you how worthless those things are which you worshipped, while you, who received your living spirit from the Lord, are truly better [than they]) *HE*, ii.10

[147] Wallace-Hadrill, *EGK*, p.31; see also Gregory's letter to Æthelberht found in *HE*, i.32

Æthelberht.[148] Instead, he made promises of heavenly and temporal rewards to win converts. He allowed the pagan temples to stand, although they were to be cleansed with holy water and consecrated to God. Finally, he tolerated the use of Christianity as a justification for war. Æthelberht would have been permitted to believe that the Peace of God was the peace of mind that came with the knowledge that one had vanquished God's enemies and compelled them to observe his commands.[149]

Further, when possible, the missionaries exploited these values to accomplish their objective. One of the things that the Germanic people set great store by was the oath.[150] Paulinus played upon this when he came to Edwin and reminded him of the stranger who had visited him in East Anglia. Edwin had promised to obey the one who had aided him in his youth, and Paulinus called in the debt of honour to persuade Edwin to convert.[151] In this case, the Germanic values worked in favour of the missionaries.

Some Roman missionaries also tried to bring the Anglo-Saxons around by overwhelming them with their knowledge. True to Roman tradition, the missionaries were fond of using logic and rhetoric. Since they did not believe in conversion by the sword, they had to rely on the art of speaking to win converts. The Synod of Whitby was conducted in the style of a Roman debate, and Bede maintained that it was the persuasiveness of Wilfrid's argument that carried the day for the Romans.[152] It

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[148] Wallace-Hadrill, *EGK*, p.29

[149] Wallace-Hadrill, *EGK*, p.31

[150] Whitelock, *BES*, p.41

[151] Stenton, p.114

[152] *HE*, iii.25

was also, according to Bede, Paulinus' argument and the sagacity of the counsel given by Edwin's advisors which finally convinced the king to embrace the new religion. There are several examples of such arguments preserved, such as the advice of Edwin's counsellors, letters sent by Pope Boniface to Edwin and Æthelburh, and Augustine's first attempt to convince Æthelberht to accept Christianity, to name but a few.

Most insightful in this respect, however, is a letter written by Bishop Daniel of Winchester to St. Boniface in 722. St. Boniface was in Germany trying to win converts there when Daniel wrote to him to offer advice on how best to structure his argument. He suggested that St. Boniface should avoid arguing points of Germanic theology with the pagans, rather he should bombard them with a series of questions about their gods so that, through trying to answer them, they might come to their own understanding about the ambiguities and shortcomings of their religion.

> These and similar questions, and many others that it would be tedious to mention, should be put to them, not in an offensive and irritating way but calmly and with great moderation. From time to time their superstitions should be compared with our Christian dogmas and touched upon indirectly, so that the heathens, more out of confusion than exasperation, may be ashamed of their absurd opinions and may recognize that their disgusting rites and legends have not escaped our notice.[153]

The key, according to Daniel, was not to dazzle the pagans with Roman brilliance but rather to make them embarrassed by the shortcomings of their own religion and let them conclude for

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[153] Daniel's letter to St. Boniface translated in Hillgarth, p.136

themselves that Christianity was the better religion. Like Gregory, Daniel felt that tolerance, patience and gentle persuasion were the means by which they would win converts.

The implication in the letter was that sometimes missionaries would get into futile arguments with the pagans. It is also apparent that some missionaries were prone to preaching hellfire and damnation to those who would not convert. Although Eddius writes that Wilfrid, when proselytizing the South Saxons, used gentle persuasion, "quasi lac sine dolo dedisset," he also made it clear that "aeterna poena peccatoribus... praeparabitur."[154] Further, some preachers were not so gentle in their threats. When Oswald looked to Iona for a bishop, he was initially sent a man who was so harsh in his preaching that he had to be returned to Iona and replaced by Aidan, a man renowned for his gentleness and compassion. Generally, contemporàries who wrote on the subject were agreed that gentle persuasion was the most successful way to win over the pagans.

The Celts, for their part, had always taken preaching very seriously, understanding its importance both for converting pagans and for sustaining conversion once it had been achieved. Leslie Hardinge suggests that the Irish missionaries took a great deal of care in preparing their sermons. They stressed clarity above all. The scriptures were read aloud, first in Latin, then in the vernacular, and were then paraphrased for easier comprehension. A few written sermons that have survived exhibit good organization, with clear statements of purpose at the beginning and end of the sermon. For the most part, the preachers drew their lessons straight from the Bible, but it is interesting to note that they also made use of apocrypha and

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[154] (giving, so to speak, milk without guile) and (eternal damnation will be prepared for sinners) Eddius, c.49

"imagination" to provide details not found in the Bible. Their main objective was to teach people about God, Christ, heaven and hell, and they achieved this by using homilies and by the question-and-answer method.[155] In such a setting it is not difficult to see how the Celtic priest might try to use simple, practical explanations, but also how his imagination might get carried away when some of the questions became difficult or obscure.

It is more difficult to determine exactly what was preached to the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century. We know where the preaching was done—first outdoors at public places marked by crosses, and eventually in small churches built at those locations—and we can discern some of the attitudes that various churchmen had about preaching and pastoral care. While Pope Gregory preferred tolerance and gentle persuasion, Pope Boniface was less tolerant. Paulinus, for his part, whose imagination seems to have been taxed to the limit in his search for a way to convince Edwin to convert, finally found a successful method by utilizing Edwin's Anglo-Saxon values rather than struggling against them. Still others, like Bishop Daniel, preferred the fine art of Roman rhetoric, a method also admired by Wilfrid, who like to display his wit and knowledge to an audience. Wilfrid was also not averse to preaching hellfire, even though this tactic had proven unsuccessful for Aidan's predecessor in Oswald's court. Aidan was himself a gentle man, who preferred the Celtic style of teaching which made use of open discussion and vernacular sermons. While these examples indicate the methods used to proselytize, they do not provide much indication of what was actually said to the potential converts. For this we must take a different

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[155] Leslie Hardinge, *The Celtic Church in Britain* (London, 1972) pp.41-48

approach, and look to the literature of the Anglo-Saxons to gain a perspective on what they heard.

Chapter Five

The Final Stage: Internalizing Christianity

Up to this point, this discussion has focussed on the methods used by both the Roman and Irish missionaries to bring Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons. True spiritual conversion, however, had to come from within the converts themselves. Although the missionaries provided the Anglo-Saxons with an ecclesiastical infrastructure and the necessary information, it was ultimately up to the converts to decide if they would accept or reject the doctrines that they had been taught.

The fact that Christianity was taught to the Anglo-Saxons within the confines of their own language was an important factor in the conversion process. Careful study of the lexicon used by the educators provides important clues to the transmission of Christian ideas and ideals. The difficulty of explaining such concepts is especially problematic when dealing with a language barrier. This was not restricted to the problems that Cenwalh encountered when he grew impatient with Agilberht because of the bishop's "outlandish accent," nor was it limited to Aidan's troubles when he had to have Oswald translate for him.[156] While the matter of the communication barrier can be overcome by learning the foreign language, the utility of such an approach is limited when one is constrained by an insufficient lexicon. The work done by J.A. Sheard and Mary Serjeantson, who have traced many Anglo-Saxon words to

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[156] O'Neill, p.12

their origins, has revealed that, for the most part, practical words, i.e., those for ecclesiastical office, vestments and services, were borrowed directly from the Latin at the time of the conversion, such as *diacon* (Latin, *diaconus*) or *pæll*, (Latin, *pallium*). Alternatively, conceptual words, such as *fulwian* (to make fully holy) and *dyppan* (to dip), both meaning 'to baptize,' were either translated directly into Old English, adapted from Old English words, or had altogether new words coined for them, such as *westensetla* (a coined word for 'one who settles in the waste land') for 'hermit.'[157] The logic behind this is that a Latin priest could simply tell his Saxon pupil, 'this man is a *diacon*' or 'please pass me my *pæll*' and the pupil could learn the Latin names while no more explanation is necessary. If the priest wished to explain a concept to his pupil, however, he would have to explain the words more fully. He could tell his pupil, 'we baptize our converts and this makes them fully holy.' The Saxon would understand, 'you *dyppan* them, and *fulwian* them,' and then he has grasped the concept.

One hindrance to the preaching of Christianity that was already apparent when the news of Jesus came out of Palestine was that the character of Christ was coloured by the language of the people to whom the story was being told. For example, when Paul preached to the Corinthians, he spoke in Greek so he could be understood. Consequently, he used the Greek word for 'lord' which is *kyrios*. *Kyrios*, however, had a different connotation than the Judaic word for 'lord,' *adonai*, which had secular connotations of a landlord, or a master. *Kyrios*, however, has the added connotation of deity, for it was a word

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[157] J.A. Sheard, *The Words We Use* (London, 1954) pp.148,155-159; Mary S. Serjeantson, *A History of Foreign Words in English*. 3rd ed. (London, 1962) pp.14-26

that the Corinthians applied to their gods as well as to their secular lords.

It was at the point when the gospel was Hellenized that Jesus became identified as having god-like qualities of his own rather than simply being a son of the deity. Whereas Jesus had simply identified himself as 'Son of Man,' "Paul clearly preferred the title 'Lord' *(Kyrios)* which occurs everywhere in his letters and which not only spoke meaningfully to gentile ears... but conferred on Jesus a spiritual rank which demanded worship."[158] Similarly, one of the Anglo-Saxon words for 'lord' is *bealdur.* The first thought that would enter the mind of the Anglo-Saxon who was told that *Jesus is bealdur* is obvious—the parallels are seen immediately, particulary by the Anglo-Saxon who has heard the story of this pagan god.

In the pagan religion, the counterpart of Jesus Christ was Balder, the son of Oðin and Frig. According to the myth, it had been foretold that if Balder died, the end of the world and the doom of the gods would soon follow. To prevent this, Frig extracted a promise from all creation not to harm Balder. It soon became a game amongst the gods to gather together and throw weapons at Balder, to see them bounce off without harming him. However, Frig had overlooked mistletoe and, as a result, had not secured that plant's promise. Loki the mischief-maker learned of this. He cut down some mistletoe, made a spear out of it, then took it to the game. He placed it in the hands of a blind man, Höð, who threw the spear, hit Balder and killed him. Balder then went down to the underworld.

Balder's brother, Hermóð, out of grief and out of fear of the prophesy, rode down to the underworld, and asked the guardian, Hel, if there was any way he could bargain to have

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[158] A.M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology* (London, 1957, rep. 1978) pp.104-105

Balder back. She replied,

> Ok ef allir hlutir í heiminum, kykvir ok dauðir, gráta hann, þá skal hann fara til ása aftr, en haldast með Helju, ef nakkvarr mælir við eða vill eigi gráta.[159]

All creation agreed and wept, except for Loki. Balder could not be resurrected.

Although the cult of Balder was not as strong in England as it was in Scandinavia, place name evidence makes it clear that he was still well known, especially in the north, where the poem, "The Dream of the Rood" was composed some time around A.D. 700.[160]

This poem is essentially a story of the Crucifixion, told from the point of view of the cross. Although it is definitely a Christian poem, it does not contain the standard characters or events of the Biblical story. Furthermore, it is not until a third of the way through the poem that the word *rōd* is used; until then, the cross is referred to as a "tree" or "wood". Nor is the young hero referred to as Christ. Until this point, the audience cannot be sure if the poet is talking about the Christian cross, or Yggdrasill, the pagan mythical tree which contains the universe. Similarly, it is not clear if the hero is Christ or Balder, for the references could pertain to either. The poem begins with the persona describing the dream he had about a wondrous "tree" covered in jewels, with roots

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[159] (If everyone in all parts of the world, alive and dead, weep for him, then he shall go back to the Æsir, but he will remain with Hel if anyone speaks out against this and will not weep.) *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar,* ed. Guðni Jónsson (Akureyri, 1954) c.49

[160] Brian Branston, *The Lost Gods of England.* 2nd ed. (London, 1974) p.161

reaching to the ends of the earth. As he watched, the tree underwent a transformation. The jewels disappeared, and it became soaked with blood. Then the tree began to speak, telling its own story of how it was cut down and dragged to a hill. There, the young hero stripped himself of his garments and climbed upon the tree. As the tree explains, "gestah he on gealgan heanne, / modig on manigra gesyhðe, / þa he wolde mancyn lysan."[161] The hero's enemies then stuck them both with nails, soaking them in the hero's blood.

Until this point, the allusions are confusing: the tree with roots reaching to the ends of the earth is a definite reference to Yggdrasill. The poem also contains pagan motifs, such as the tales of being 'stuck through,' and of a young hero dying a bloody death. Even so, the description does not lie completely within the limits of pagan poetry. The young hero, rather than putting on his war garments to perform his heroic deed, strips them off, and he does it for the sake of mankind rather than for personal glory. At this point, the identity of the hero becomes clear. He is Christ, not Balder. This initial ambiguity shows the audience the parallels between Christ and Balder. This makes Christ more accessible to a pagan, or a newly converted audience. It defines Jesus in terms that the people understand: Christ is just like Balder, except for a few details.

The communication of ideas was fundamental to the transmission of Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons. For this reason, the missionaries and teachers overcame the problem of the language barrier by adapting words that the people already understood. Similarly, by suggesting parallels between the two

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[161] (he climbed on the high cross, courageous in the sight of many, so that he could redeem mankind.) "The Dream of the Rood," ll.40-41

religions, such as those between Christ and Balder, the teachers utilized religious concepts that the people already understood. This made Christianity accessible to the converts. Ultimately, however, for a true spiritual conversion to take place, Christianity had to be made desirable to them. This final step was aided by the Anglo-Saxons themselves, in that they had an innate fear of chaos.

The conflict between order and chaos was a popular theme in Anglo-Saxon literature. In the literature that has been examined for this paper, order is represented by images of fire under control so that it provides light and warmth, and the hall, which provides shelter from the elements. A final image is a well-ordered society represented by a chieftain who presides in the hall, and who is surrounded by his loyal retainers and the treasure he shares with them. In "The Wanderer," the exile looks back longingly to the days when he dwelt in such a hall with his lord and companions:

> þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
> clyppe ond cysse ond on cneo lecge
> honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
> in geardagum giefstolas breac.[162]

The image of the well-ordered hall is portrayed even more explicitly in Bede's story of the parable of the sparrow, when Edwin's advisor succinctly draws the distinction between order and chaos:

> te residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac
> ministris tuis tempore brumali, accenso
> quidem foco in medio et calido effecto

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[162] (it seems to him in his mind that he embraces and kisses his lord and lays his hands and head on [his lord's] knee, just as he had in the former days when he enjoyed his gifts.) "The Wanderer," ll.41-44

> cenaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemalium pluuiarum uel niuium.[163]

Here the distinction is clearly drawn: order is represented by the lord, sitting in the warm, dry hall with his thegns while the winter storms rage outside.

In contrast to order, chaos is represented by elements out of control, particularly images of the sea and fire. Darkness is also a symbol of chaos, and related to it is a fear of what may be lurking in the darkness. It is a fear of the unknown. The Anglo-Saxons surmised what may have been beyond the safe walls of their halls, and monsters such as Grendel became malicious incarnations of chaos.

The sea figures prominently in "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer," in which the personae are stranded on or beside the turbulent ocean, alone and far away from the comforts of a warm hall and their companions. In the following passage, the Wanderer wakes from a dream about his companions to see the ocean before him, and the fading images of his friends as they recede into the waves.

> Đonne onwæcneð eft wineleas guma
> gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas
> baþian brimfuglas brædan feþra
> hreosan hrim ond snaw hagle gemenged.
> Þon beoð ̇þy hefigran heortan benne,
> sare æfter swæsne sorg bið geniwad
> þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð
> greteð gliw-stafum georne geond-sceawað

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[163] (You [Edwin] reside in the hall with your earls and advisors in wintertime, while a fire burns in the central hearth and it is warm inside; outside, however, the winter storms of rain and snow whirl furiously.) *HE*, ii.13

secga geseldan swimmað oft on weg.[164]

Similarly, the Seafarer tells how he is bereft of his kindred, and alone on the cold sea:

wine-mægum bidroden,
bihongen hrim-gicelum hægle scurum fleag
þær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ
is-calde wæg.[165]

Fire as an image of chaos figures prominently in Germanic mythology, in which the realms of man and the gods are consumed by fire in the Ragnarøk, or the Doom of the Gods, at the end of time:

Sól mun sortna, søkkr fold í mar,
hverfa af himni heiðdar stjornur;
geisar eimi ok aldrnari,
leikr hár hiti við himin sjálfan.[166]

The image of fire and excessive heat is also used in the *Exodus*

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[164] (Then the friendless warrior awakens again and sees the dark waves before him. Sea birds bathe and spread their wings, and the frost and snow, mixed with hail, fall. The painful wounds of his heart are heavier after his dream. Sorrow is renewed when the memory of his friends passes through his mind. He eagerly looks upon the companions of warriors and greets them joyfully and then they swim away on the waves.) "The Wanderer," ll.45-54

[165] (Deprived of beloved kinsmen where icicles hung and the hail flew in storms—there I did not hear anything but the roaring sea and the ice cold waves.) "The Seafarer," ll.16-19

[166] (The sun will grow dark. Earth will sink into the sea. The bright stars will disappear from heaven. Smoke and fire will rage, and the tall flames will challenge heaven itself.) Snorri's Edda, "Voluspa," ed. E.V. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Norse*. 2nd ed. (1957) p.20, ll.504-7; See also Grant, *"Beowulf,"* p.47

poem in the description of the land which lay just to the south of the Israelites' path as they escaped from the Pharaoh's army:

> Nearwe genyddon on norðwegas,
> wiston him be suðan Sigelwara land,
> forbærned burhleoðu, brune leode,
> hatum heofoncolum.[167]

In "The Dream of the Rood," the images of light and darkness represent the contest between good and evil. The cross itself is described as "leohte bewunden, beama beorhtost."[168] In contrast, when Christ dies on the cross, the images of darkness prevail:

> bewrigen mid wolcnum Þystro hæfdon
> scirne sciman Wealdendes hræw
> wan under wolcnum.[169] sceadu forð eode

In *Beowulf* we see the incarnation of the monsters who lurk in the darkness, namely Grendel, his mother, and the dragon. About Grendel, the poet writes, "Gewat ða neosian, syþðan niht becom."[170] Similarly, Grendel's mother, in an attempt to avenge

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[167] (They travelled in the northern regions for it was known to them that in the south, in the Sundweller's land, the hot furnace of the skies burned the countryside and darkened the people.) *Exodus*, 11.68-71

[168] (enveloped in light, the brightest of beams) "The Dream of the Rood," 11.5-6

[169] (Darkness had covered the corpse of the Lord with clouds; a shadow, dark under the clouds, invaded the bright splendour.) "The Dream of the Rood," 11.52-55

[170] ([Grendel] goes out to attack as soon as night falls.) *Beowulf*, 1.115

her son, also attacked Heorot in the night, as is implied by the statement that Beowulf and his companions waited until the first light of morning to follow her tracks back to the moor, "Samod ærdæge, eode eorla sum."[171] Finally the dragon also waited for the night before leaving his lair to take vengeance for a cup that was stolen from him:

earfoðlice
wæs ða gebolgen
wolde se laða
drincfæt dyre.
wyrme on willan;
bidan wolde,
fyre gefysed.[172]

Hordweard onbad
oð ðæt æfen cwom;
beorges hyrde,
lige forgyldan
Þa wæs dæg sceacen
no on wealle læ[n]g
ac mid bæle for,

As Grant has suggested, "these evil and monstrous deeds have to take place at night, for such evil cannot stand the light of common day, the Light of God."[173]

These symbols of chaos represent those aspects of nature

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[171] (The warriors went together at daybreak.) *Beowulf*, ll.1311-12

[172] (The guardian of the treasure impatiently waited for evening to come. The cave-keeper was enraged: his hostile fire would avenge his precious cup. When the day was gone, the happy dragon would not wait inside his walls, but went forth, armed with fire.) *Beowulf*, ll.2302-09

[173] Grant, *"Beowulf,"* p.49. Grant also discusses in detail the Anglo-Saxon explanations for the existence of monsters. Besides the theory that they were descended from Cain, which appears in *Beowulf*, and is derived from one interpretation of *Genesis* vi.2, it was also suggested that monsters were descended from the fallen angels whose bodies, but not souls, were destroyed in the Flood. This explanation was provided by Justin Martyr in his interpretation of *Genesis* vi.2 and is expanded in the *Guthlac* poems. A third explanation, provided by the Irish, is that the monsters were descended from Noah's evil son Ham, who was the first person to be cursed after the flood. Grant, *"Beowulf,"* pp.56-58

which are beyond man's control: the sea, the weather, wild fire, and the evil beings who were cast away from humanity. In the Anglo-Saxon world view, chaos was always looming close, ready to overwhelm order, as would happen at Ragnarøk. As a result, the Anglo-Saxons had a sincere interest in combatting chaos and bringing order to it. This hope was expressed by Edwin's advisor, who believed that he saw in Christianity some hope that it would at least resolve the frightening issue of the unknown. As Edwin is sitting with his thegns in his hall,

> aduensis unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens mox per aliud exierit, ipso quidem tempore quo intus est hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen paruissimo spatio serenitatis as momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens tuis oculis elabitur. Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Vnde, si haec noua doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda uidetur.[174]

This story touches upon a recurrent Anglo-Saxon nightmare: the fear of exile, the fear of being cast away from the light, warmth and organization of hall. Edwin's advisor equates death with exile. When a man dies, he, like the sparrow, leaves the ordered hall and enters a dark stormy night to be lost, cold and isolated from the comforts of humanity.

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[174] (a sparrow flies quickly through the hall—it enters through one door and leaves through the other. For that time that it is inside, the storms of winter cannot touch it, but after a brief calm moment out of the storm, that same little sparrow returns to the winter, slipping away from your eyes. So this life of man appears for a moment. Of what follows, however, or of what comes before, we remain ignorant. Therefore, if this new doctrine offers something certain, it is worthy that we should follow it.) *HE*, ii.13

What fed this fear of exile was the knowledge that earthly things were transient, that halls could be destroyed by time and disaster, and that men would grow old and die. The pagan Anglo-Saxons attributed this transience to the mercilessness of Fate, as is bitterly acknowledged by the Wanderer, who believes that "wyrd bið ful-aræd."[175] The Wanderer's irony, however, is that he knows that he could find comfort in the Christian God: "Oft him anhaga / are gebideð / metudes miltse."[176] These conflicting gnomes, that of Fate's inflexibility and God's mercy, are set up side by side within the first five lines of the poem. Having established the contest between the two, the Wanderer looks at his own situation, sees it as hopeless, and falls into Fate's camp. He declares "wyrd seo mære," (Fate is the greater), and his final words are:

> Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice
> onwendað wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum
> Her bið feoh læne her bið freond læne
> her bið mon læne her bið mæg læne
> eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð.[177]

He refuses to be comforted. Instead, he comes to believe that ultimately, mankind will succumb to chaos because Fate has decreed it, and mankind is helpless to stop it.[178]

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[175] (Fate is wholly inexorable) "The Wanderer," l.5

[176] (Often the lonely one experiences compassion, the Creator's kindness.) "The Wanderer," ll.1-2

[177] (all this realm of earth, the world under heaven, is fraught with hardship. The fates decree change. Here wealth is transitory, here friends are transitory, here man is transitory, here kinsmen are transitory. The entire foundation of this earth is worthless.) "The Wanderer," l.100,106-110

[178] By taking the persona through this arduous spiritual journey, however, the narrator himself comes to a different conclusion. Once the persona has finished speaking, the narrator

In contrast, the Seafarer, who finds himself in much the same situation as the Wanderer, comes to the opposite conclusion. Like the Wanderer, the Seafarer acknowledges the transience of earthly things, "Ic gelyfe no / þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.[179] However, he does not let this knowledge trouble him. Even though he knows that chaos will take over the earth, he does not fear it. Indeed, he will even voluntarily go into chaos, here represented by the sea, because as long as he has his faith in the Christian God, there will always be order:

> Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan
> min modsefa mid mereflod
> ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide
> eorþan sceatas cymeð eft to me
> gifre ond grædig gielleð anfloga
> hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
> ofer holma gelagu. Forþon me hatran sind
> Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif
> læne on londe.[180]

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takes over. Having witnessed the Wanderer in his misery, the narrator concludes, "Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ, ne sceal næfre his torn to rycene / beorn of his breostum acyþan, nemþe he ær þa bote cunne, / eorl mid elne gefremman. Wel bið þam þe him are seceð, / frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð." (Good is he who keeps his faith, nor shall the man ever reveal the sorrow in his heart too quickly unless he has the strength and first knows where to find the remedy. Well it is for him who seeks consolation from the Father in heaven, where all security stands.) "The Wanderer, ll.112-115

[179] (I do not believe that earthly wealth will endure forever.) "The Seafarer," ll.66-67

[180] (Indeed, now my thought, my spirit, wanders over my heart to the sea-flood, and wanders wide over the whales' home. The earth's regions come to me again. The lone bird yells, eager and greedy, and irresistibly urges my heart on the whale-way, over the ocean's flood. For to me the Lord's joys are more exciting than this dead life, which is transitory on earth.) "The Seafarer," ll.58-64

To the Seafarer, death is not exile from the comforting hall. Rather, it is the means by which he will attain order. In contrast to the Wanderer's pessimistic conclusion, the Seafarer's final words are:

	Wyrd biþ swiþre
meotud meaghtigra	þonne ænges monnes gehygd.
Uton we hycgan	hwær we ham agen
one þonne geþencan	hu we þider cumen
one we þonne eac tilien	þæt we to moten
in þa ecan	eadignesse
þær is lif gelong	in lufan dryhtnes
hyht in heofonum.	þæs sy þam halgan þonc
þæt he usic geweorþade	wuldres ealdor
ece dryhten	in ealle tid.[181]

The Seafarer's attitude is that God is in heaven, so let Fate do what it will on earth. As long as there is eternal order in heaven, it does not matter that earthly things are transient. In this respect, Christianity has resolved an important issue for the Anglo-Saxons: it tells them what happens to the proverbial sparrow after it leaves the hall, and promises that, as long as the Anglo-Saxons accept Christianity, they can expect to experience the victory of order over chaos in the afterlife.

Unfortunately, to achieve such order, man has to die. What poems such as "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" do not reveal is how mankind is to get by while they still live. On earth they must still fear chaos. Further, it is not simply the fear of decay wrought by time, for as the *Beowulf* poet

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[181] (Fate is mighty, the Creator mightier than any man's thoughts. Let us consider where we have a home, and then think how we may come thither, and then also prepare ourselves so that we may go there, into the eternal happiness where life depends on the Lord's love and the joy in heaven. Therefore thanks be to the holy one that he has honoured us: the prince of glory, the eternal Lord, in all time.) "The Seafarer," ll.115-124

makes abundantly clear, chaos has its own retainers—the monsters who lurk in the darkness, prowling on the outskirts of humanity, waiting for an opportunity to strike and destroy order. One such monster was Grendel, the incarnation of chaos, set to destroy the established order of Heorot:

Gewat ða neosian,
hean huses
æfter beorþege
Fand þa ðær inne
swefan æfter symble;
wonsceaft wera.
grim one grædig,
reoc ond reþe,
þritig þegna;
huðe hremig
mid þære wælfylle

ac ymb ane niht
morðbeala mare,
fæhðe ond fyrene;

syþðan niht becom,
hu hit Hring-Dene
gebun hæfdon.
æþelinga gedriht
sorge ne cuðon,
Wiht unhælo,
gearo sone wæs,
ond on ræste genam
þanon eft gewat
to ham faran,
wica neosan.

Næs hit lengra fyrst,
eft gefremede
ond no mearn fore,
wæs to fæst on þam.[182]

Once his attacks began in earnest, the Danes sought a protector. They turned to the pagan gods in vain, and finally their hero proved to be a man. Beowulf struggled against chaos and was reasonably successful for a time. Man is ultimately transient, however, and in the end Beowulf, too, succumbed to

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[182] ([Grendel] went to attack the lofty halls as soon as it was night, when the Ring-Danes had settled down after their beer-drinking. He found in there a prince's band of retainers who were asleep after the banquet. They did not know sorrow nor the misery of men. The unholy, grim and greedy creature was soon alert, fierce and cruel, and he seized thirty thegns from their beds. Afterwards, he left the hall triumphantly and went home with his fill of the slaughter from his attack on the dwelling-place... Nor was it the last time, for after one night he came forth again for more murder, and he did not regret his hostile acts and crimes, for he was too fixed upon them.) *Beowulf*, ll.115-125,134-137

chaos.

Grant argues that

> *Beowulf* cannot be interpreted as a Christian poem in the fullest sense, for its values are pagan... The poem equates the pagan idea of Fate, of Wyrd, with Old Testament Christianity, which it would be quite impossible to do with New Testament Christianity. Admittedly there is a stability and order in eternity, but not here on earth; whatever takes place on earth, in Heorot, in Grendel's cave, in Finnsburg, does not affect the divine order one way or another. Men and monsters may do as they may—the universe shrugs. There is a song of creation, but it is Grendel, not God, who hears it. Light from God shines on the waters after the Breca episode and light lances through the waters of Grendel's mere after the slaying of his mother, but only *after* Beowulf has done all the work; there is not yet a Christ to harrow Hell—man has to do it himself. There is not yet a Christ to conquer death.[183]

In essence, the *Beowulf* poet has identified a conundrum without sufficiently resolving it. It is as though the poet, on behalf of his society, is falling into the same trap as the Wanderer: he recognizes the problem, is likely aware of the offered solution—for if he is knowledgable of the Old Testament it is very likely that he is acquainted with the New—yet he chooses to surrender to despair. He very much resembles a potential convert who is completely undecided; he recognizes that Christianity offers the answer for which he is looking, but is not quite able to believe what he has been told. If he believes that man is responsible to combat chaos, then he has

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[183] Grant, *"Beowulf,"* pp.63-64

not yet grasped what the missionaries were trying to tell him about the magnitude of God's power.

The answer is found in the Bible, in the Old English version of *Exodus*. Here it is not man at all but God who combats chaos by shielding the Israelites from the heat of the sun by providing them with cloud cover:

> wið færbryne — þær halig God
> bælce oferbrædde — folc gescylde,
> halgan nette — byrnendne heofon,
> Hæfde wederwolcen — hatwendne lyft.
> eorðan and uprodor — widum fæðmum
> efne gedæled.[184]

It is notable that this miracle does not appear in the Old Testament; it is exclusively Anglo-Saxon, which suggests that the scribe was particularly interested in showing how God could overcome the elements of chaos.

Indeed, as the poem further emphasizes, God not only combats chaos, but he can control it as well. Not only did he part the Red Sea:

> Sælde sægrundas — suðwind fornam,
> bæðweges blæst; — brim is areafod,
> sand sæcir spaw. — Ic wat soð gere
> þæt eow mihtig God — miltse gecyðde,
> eorlas ærglade![185]

He also made it swallow up the Pharaoh's army:

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[184] (Holy God shielded the people from the burning fire. He spread a divine cloud over the burning sky. The broad cloud had even separated the earth from the heavens above.) *Exodus*, ll.71-76.

[185] (The southwind has taken away the sea's strength. The water is stripped from the sea bottom and the sand is spurned. I know truly that Almighty God has shown his mercy to you, joyful men.) *Exodus*, ll.289-294

heah of heofonum
famigbosma;
unhleowan wæg
þæt ðy deaðdrepe
synfullra sweot.[186]

Witrod gefeol
handweorc Godes,
flodweard gesloh
alde mece,
drihte swæfon

Here is true power over chaos; it becomes a tool in God's hands.

Finally, God did not intend at all for man to be responsible to combat chaos. This point is made clear in the poem, "The Dream of the Rood:"

seðe on eorþan
on ðam gealgtreowe,
He us onlysde
heofonlince ham.
mid bledum and mid blisse,
se sunu wæs sigorfæst
mihtig and spedig
gasta weorode,

Si me dryhten freond
ær þrowode
for guman synnum.
and us lif forgeaf,
Hiht wæs geniwad,
ðam ðe ðær bryne þolodon
on ðam siðfate,
ða he mid manigeo com,
on Godes rice.[187]

Christ is the warrior in his battle gear who mounts the cross to save men from chaos.

Thus the issue of chaos was resolved for the Anglo-Saxons. Their fear of the unknown was replaced by an assurance that the afterlife would be far better than any possible man-made order.

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[186] (Down from heaven fell God's handiwork, the foamy flood. The guardian of the flood slew the unprotected part of the force as if with a sword. By that death-blow the commander and the armies of the sinful died.) *Exodus*, ll.492-497

[187] (May the Lord, who once suffered here on earth on the cross for the sins of men, befriend me. He redeemed us and gave us life and a heavenly home. Hope was restored with glory and joy because he endured the burning fire. The mighty and successful son was triumphant on that journey when he came with a company of angels into God's kingdom.) "The Dream of the Rood," ll.144-152

Further, they no longer needed to fear chaos on earth since God had the power to combat, and even control, it. Finally, man did not need to concern himself with the battle against chaos, as this responsibility had been assumed by Christ. All these things appealed to the Anglo-Saxons' psyche, and they served to convince them that Christianity was superior to their pagan beliefs.

Summary and Conclusion

When dealing with the conversion of a society to Christianity, it must be emphasized that this process can be taken to one of three degrees. These are the superficial, which is predominantly characterized by political motives and entails little or no regard for the religion itself; the conditional, which involves some degree of interaction between the deity and the convert, although the motives are still predominantly temporal; and the spiritual, which entails an internalization of the religion. Getting the society to this final stage of conversion, in which a significant number of people have experienced a spiritual conversion, was a lengthy and complex process, involving several stages. The adherents of the Roman Church, following the guidelines set out by Pope Gregory, had a general agenda for carrying out this process.

The first, and perhaps the most crucial, step was to gain the support of the kings. There are several reasons for this. First, the king, as the lord of the comitatus, had a great deal of influence over his followers. Further, because of the sacrality that was inherent in Germanic kingship, it was not feasible that a society would consider a change of religion without the sanction of its king. Second, the ecclesiastical institution could not hope to survive without royal support. In addition to royal protection and financial support, the kings could also aid the Church both by encouraging its physical growth and by setting an example of behaviour for their subjects to follow.

Given the Church's desperate need of royal support, its members set out to make the Church indispensable not only to individual kings but also to the nature of kingship as a whole. Initially, the missionaries, under Gregory's guidance, made

promises of heavenly and temporal rewards and were quite tolerant of the kings' doctrinal misunderstandings. They were so dependent on the temporal support of the kings that they willingly accepted even superficial and conditional conversions by the monarchs.

Once royal baptisms had been achieved, subtle changes began to take place, as the kings were made to understand that they would have to cooperate with the missionaries and work in concert with the Church. Christianity removed the sacrality that had been inherent in Germanic kingship, and made it necessary for monarchs to earn their sanctity if they wanted to maintain the religious aspects of their office. Gregory made it clear to Æthelberht that the best way to earn this sanctity was to acknowledge that Augustine would henceforth intercede between the king and God, and that Æthelberht's new religious role would be to protect and support the Church. For the most part, Christian Anglo-Saxon kings accepted this stipulation. Even Cenwalh of Wessex changed his attitude when he felt that God was punishing him for neglecting his royal obligations to the Church.

Having thus secured the protection and support they required, the Roman missionaries undertook the second stage of the conversion process: the establishment of the infrastructure necessary to organize the daily functions of the Church. To the Roman mind, it was inconceivable that the conversion of a people could happen without such a highly structured organization. Gregory felt that the bishops should be responsible for the people in their diocese, though others like Bede, while agreeing to this, felt that the bishop would need help with this task. This meant that clerics had to be trained, which in turn required that decent educational centres be established. If the missionaries were to carry conversion to the people and care for their souls once they had been

converted, an institution had to be established to insure that that these tasks could be carried out in a uniform and orderly manner.

The English situation did not lend itself to such a development, however, as two problems quickly arose. The first was the lack of competent leadership from Canterbury. This problem was eventually rectified by the appointment of Theodore of Tarsus to the Archbishopric, as he had the charisma and educational qualifications to bring the floundering, poorly organized English Church up to Continental standards.

The second problem was the presence of the Irish, for while they also had an interest in bringing Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons, they were not prepared to conform to the Roman agenda. This caused some political difficulties, as was seen at Whitby in 664, but when it came time to bring Christianity to the general populace, the two came to complement each other quite well. Roman organization on a national scale—something for which the Irish did not have much propensity—proved to be quite useful in unifying the English Church. On the other hand, the Celts had a great deal to offer in terms of education and learning. Indeed, their contribution in this respect was so great that the Romans could not hope to eradicate it, only to assimilate it. English students had access to both traditions, and there is ample evidence to suggest that many took advantage of the broad range of subjects that were available to them. This ultimately resulted in the development of a generation of scholars who were neither Roman nor Irish, but English.

Such scholars were best qualified to address the questions and concerns of the converts. Certainly there were varying methods of preaching, some of which were more successful than others. When these various methods were compared, however,

even by those who adhered to them, it was generally decided that gentleness and discussion were the most successful. The Anglo-Saxons did not need to hear of hellfire and damnation, for their own religion was already rife with such concepts. What they wanted to know was how to avoid such an end and the means by which the Christian God could prevent it. The English scholars, who understood this desire first-hand and yet were also well-versed in Christian theology, could explain the new doctrine in terms the people could understand.

Anglo-Saxon literature has preserved many of these concerns, as well as the solutions that were found to relieve them. The recurring symbols of chaos, such as the impersonal and merciless sea, fire raging out of control, storms, darkness, and monsters who lurk in the darkness—all of which render earthly things transient—indicate that the Anglo-Saxon fear of chaos was genuine and enduring. The literature also reveals those aspects of the missionaries' teaching which caught the attention of the Saxons. Edwin's advisor was particularly interested in hearing about what happened to the proverbial sparrow when it flew out of the hall. Of all the things Paulinus might have told them that day to win them over, that was what the counsellor wanted to hear more about. What interested the Saxons was learning how the Christian God triumphed over chaos and maintained eternal order, thus bringing an end to the transience of those things that the Anglo-Saxons held most dear. Further, they learned that God would not only protect them from the elements of chaos, which was the very most that man could ever hope to do alone, but he could also control those elements. Thus Christianity offered the Anglo-Saxons ultimate protection from chaos and held the promise that the transience of life and the fickleness of fate could be overcome.

In choosing to accept Christianity for these reasons, rather than agreeing to be baptized simply for the temporal rewards, the Anglo-Saxons underwent the final stage of conversion. Once the Anglo-Saxons had accepted the religion for its own sake and internalized its doctrines, Gregory's desire to convert the English people had finally been fulfilled.

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